

JOHN ROBINSON  
THE PILGRIM PASTOR

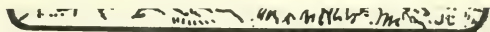
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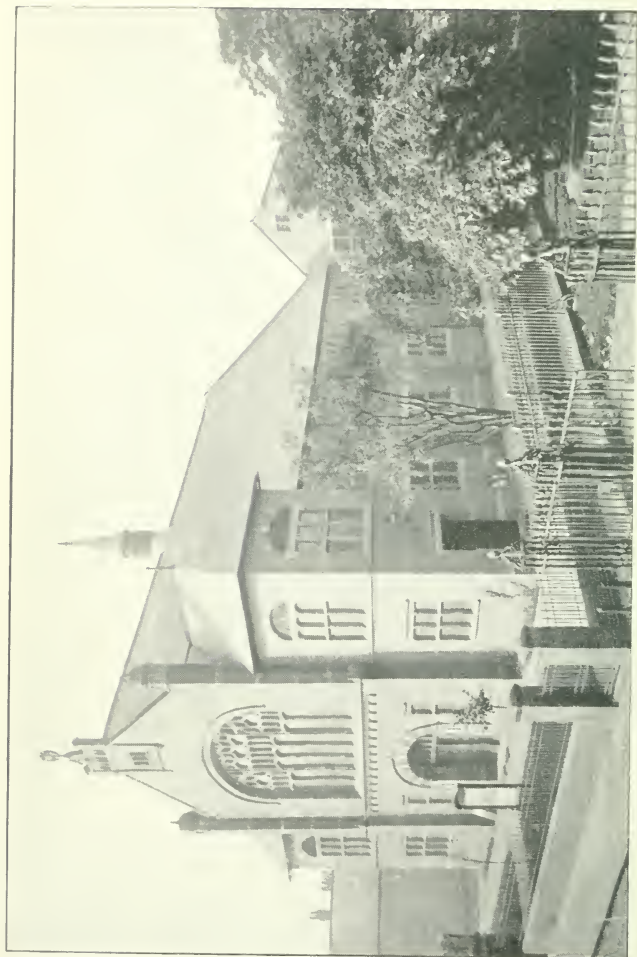












JOHN ROBINSON MEMORIAL CHURCH IN GAINSBOROUGH.

# JOHN ROBINSON

The Pilgrim Pastor

OZORA S. DAVIS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
PROFESSOR WILLISTON WALKER

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By OZORA S. DAVIS

ABOLITION  
VIRGINIA  
VIRGINIA

TO PROFESSORS  
CHESTER DAVID HARTRANFT  
MELANCTHON WILLIAMS JACOBUS  
and  
WILLISTON WALKER

*My Teachers in the Hartford Theological Seminary from*  
1891 to 1894



## INTRODUCTION

PRINCIPLES become attractive through their illustration in human lives; and any movement, whether religious or political, which is founded on great principles, is fortunate if it has a commanding personality associated with its initiation. In a Washington one sees embodied that which was noblest in the American Revolution, and in a similar way a Luther or a Wesley is typical and illustrative of the great movements associated with their names. In studying their lives we best understand the causes for which they labored, and gain most of inspiration for ourselves. Congregationalism has no one man who stands so supreme in the story of its beginnings as Wesley in those of Methodism or as Knox in the leadership of the Scotch Reformation. It bears the name of no single compelling leader as Lutheranism does, for none of its founders stood in quite the relationship to it that Luther bore to the German Reformation. But if it has had, thus, no one leader of such conspicuous preeminence, Congregationalism has had its founders, its martyrs and its exiles, to whom it delights to pay its reverence; and of these early worthies none was more attractive in his character, more wide-reaching in his influence, or more deserving of lasting remembrance, than John Robinson. Several of the leaders of early Congregational-

ism were men in whom allegiance to the truths for which they labored and sacrificed was associated with intolerance and a considerable degree of uncharitableness of judgment towards opponents, faults of temper, largely explainable, indeed, by reason of the strenuous and unequal contest in which they were engaged and the bitterness of the opposition which they encountered. One of the founders of Congregationalism, Robert Browne, made his peace with the enemies of the principles for which he for a time strenuously contended, and died repudiated by early Congregationalists, who refused to be called by his name or to be considered his disciples.

No such imperfections meet us in the character of John Robinson. Broad-minded, charitable for his age, far-visioned, he stood firmly for the truths for which he endured exile, and yet thought charitably and kindly of those who differed from him in belief. He was a strong, sweet, earnest, simple, brave, self-sacrificing pastor. In him early Separatist Congregationalism appeared at its best, and in studying him one sees revealed what was truest and noblest in its principles. Nor is it simply the charm of his own personal character that makes Robinson attractive to the student of his career. He, beyond any other leader of early Congregationalism, was the moulding force in the training of the founders of Plymouth. From the time when he first threw in his lot with the Congregational worshipers at Scrooby, probably in



1604, till the day on which he bade farewell to the emigrants about to sail on the "Speedwell" for their long voyage to the new world, his was the most potent influence in the spiritual education of the Pilgrim Church. A man of ripe scholarship, a graduate himself of the University of Cambridge, and a respected, if humble, member of the community of scholars gathered about the University at Leyden, he was well equipped to be the intellectual leader of the company of which he was pastor. But his moulding influence upon them was even more that of the temper and the spirit than of the intellect, for the personal qualities of Robinson became through his example and teaching largely those of the Pilgrim congregation itself. To have been under his ministry was, to such men as Bradford, a training in firmness of purpose, in single-minded devotion to truth, and, above all, in kindliness of feeling. In this way he helped to make the story of the beginnings at Plymouth one in which all lovers of New England delight.

Though Robinson never beheld the new land to which he sent so large a part of the congregation that he had guided and whither he himself earnestly desired to go, and though he died in the city of his Dutch exile before the colony across the sea had fully demonstrated its power to live in its new environment, he was, as truly as any man who crossed the Atlantic, one of the fathers of New England. One

may justly say of him that if we reckon importance by influence, by encouragement of associates, by the spirit which he instilled into a great enterprise, no other founder of the Pilgrim colony has higher claims to grateful remembrance than this leader who never set foot upon its soil. Others courageously executed the task for which his patient ministry had done much to fit them; and the inspiration to their endeavor was largely his work. As such, whether viewed from the standpoint of one interested in the development of a branch of the Christian Church, or of one investigating the beginnings of American colonization and political life, the career of John Robinson is of permanent significance.

Robinson's importance has long been recognized by writers on the beginnings of New England or the story of Congregationalism. His works were collected and printed and his life made the subject of a brief biographical sketch by Robert Ashton.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Henry M. Dexter presented his portrait at considerable length in his monumental volume on the beginnings of Congregationalism.<sup>2</sup> But not a little remains for the patient gleaner in this field, and Dr. Davis' investigations and discussions show in how large a measure the life of this noble Congregational leader still may reward the study de-

<sup>1</sup> "The Works of John Robinson." London. 1851.

<sup>2</sup> "The Congregationalism of the last Three Hundred Years, as Seen in its Literature." New York. 1880.

voted to it, and is still fruitful in lessons of permanent value as inspiration for self-sacrificing Christian consecration.

WILLISTON WALKER.



## PREFACE

THIS study of a personality rich in significance to the religious history of England and America has been carried on in the midst of a pastorate, and has formed for five years an avocation of increasing profit and delight. It rests upon an investigation of the sources in Robinson's preserved writings and in available contemporary literature. The writer's purpose has been to set the living man in true relationship to his own time, and to estimate his real contribution to the history of the church with which his name is most closely associated.

It is not an easy task to vitalize a controversy which has been dead for more than two centuries. And it is difficult for us to realize the intensity with which such a bygone issue could assert its paramount importance to the mind of one who thought and acted so long ago. We must awaken imagination before we can set ourselves sympathetically into the first quarter of the seventeenth century. The writer sincerely hopes that he has not introduced so many details that the imagination of any reader of this biography will be clogged through their excess. There are many events in the story of John Robinson's life which we have been unable to rescue from oblivion; yet the main lines along which his life moved are clear. Behind all these controversies,

now forgotten and dusty, is a real man. We have to do with a character who struggles and grows. Many specific details that concern dates and places are obscure; the conflict and triumph of the living man are plainly evident. This person we have sought to bring forward into the light.

Without the assistance and encouragement of Rev. W. H. Cobb, D.D., Librarian of the Congregational Library in Boston, Massachusetts, and Professor Williston Walker of Yale University, the work never could have been completed. This debt the writer gratefully acknowledges here. His heartiest thanks are also extended to Mr. Herbert R. Gibbs and Miss Sarah L. Patrick for their invaluable aid in the preparation and publication of the manuscript.

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July, 1903.

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I

JOHN ROBINSON



## CHAPTER I

### THE ANGLICAN REFORMATION AND ITS RESULTS IN THE YEAR 1606

IN any effort to understand a person in history two factors must be reckoned with. One of these is the world in which the person lived. A child is born into a social order; he comes into it bringing with him positive tendencies which shape his character and influence his choices. This inheritance is a part of his environment. The whole sphere in which he finds himself also acts upon his choices, and enters into the entire process of his growth. Hereditary tendencies and changing surroundings are necessary keys if we are to open the doors which allow us to enter the secret chambers of a person's soul. Something far more important than these is necessary, however. When one knows the ancestry and the times of Luther or of Lincoln one is far from ready to attempt to interpret the man to us. Every personality is acted upon; but he acts. There is in him a mighty energy of personal and peculiar force by means of which he impresses himself upon his time. This mighty fact of the free spirit of man, which often

defies all the laws of heredity and environment, so far at least as they have yet been framed, is the supreme factor in the effort to understand a person. The last detail in regard to the inherited traits of John Robinson might be known; the conditions of life and thought in that far-away time when he lived might be comprehended; and still we might be far from an adequate understanding of the man himself. We should still need to enter into the motives which he shaped for himself to control his action. We should require an insight into the ideals toward the realization of which he strove. We should need to see the real man acting upon his time with something which seems almost like creative energy.

To reach this deepest-hidden but most important factor the necessary way of approach is through intimate knowledge of the world in which he lived, as acting upon him and acted upon by him. The first task before us, therefore, is to attempt to set the life of John Robinson, who is commonly known as the "Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers," closely into its vital connection with the movements of religious thought and action in England and Holland between the years 1575 and 1625. This will not be so difficult or complex an effort as might seem at first thought. Robinson's

life was bound up very closely with one religious movement. He was absorbed in one line of activity. He lived in the radical movements of the Anglican Reformation.

We must sketch briefly, then, the growth of the Protestant Reformation in England until the accession of King James I, in 1603, and also outline the general plan of organization assumed by the Church of England when the policy of this king had become fixed, say in the year 1606.

England was peculiarly adapted to the spread of the Protestant movement. The claims of Rome had never been so thoroughly acknowledged in the island kingdom as they had been on the continent. The Bible had been translated early, and was read extensively both in churches and among the common people. The English, too, were by nature peculiarly loyal to their monarch in the matter of all claims which he might make for freedom from external authority. When King Henry VIII inherited the kingdom which his father had organized with consummate skill in the interests of absolutism, he found everything at the feet of the crown except the Church. The reorganization of the Church which was effected during his reign was really made possible by this independent temper of the English people. And the Act

of Supremacy, passed in November, 1534, by which the king was declared to be "the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England, called *Anglicana Ecclesia*,"<sup>1</sup> did not involve any radical changes in doctrine or deeply concern the Roman Catholic subjects in the king's realm. For Henry VIII could not be called a Protestant. He won his title "Defender of the Faith" by an attack on Luther. It is a rather grim commentary on the general inconsistency of the situation that, by the royal sanction, Protestants who denied Roman Catholic doctrine, and Roman Catholics who denied the royal supremacy were burned or hanged at the same time. The Six Articles, passed, after a discussion in which the king himself participated, by Convocation and Parliament in 1539, sanctioned the doctrine of transubstantiation; declared that communion in both bread and wine is not necessary to all persons; affirmed that priests might not marry; that vows of chastity and widowhood must be observed; that private masses were to be continued; and that auricular confession was expedient and necessary.

So far as there was a party whose policy was to advance still farther along lines of Protestant

<sup>1</sup> The Act is in Gee and Hardy, "Documents Illustrative of English Church History," London, Macmillan, 1896, pp. 243,244. I shall cite his collection hereafter as "G. & H."

doctrine, it was not permanently successful in its efforts under the leadership of Thomas Cromwell. But on the accession of King Edward VI (1547-1553), the Protestant movement found a larger possibility for supremacy opening before it. An Act was passed January 21, 1549, in which the use of a book of Common Prayer was prescribed for the whole realm.<sup>1</sup> This secured uniformity in respect to a book. The form enjoined was modeled more closely after those used in Sarum than according to any other use. It was a most important event for the history of the Anglican Church,<sup>2</sup> and marks the growth of Protestant influences in its development. These influences were exerted not only in the direction of polity, but also upon the formal doctrine of the Church. This deliberate attempt to get rid of obnoxious Roman Catholic doctrine was persistent from the time of the death of King Henry VIII.<sup>3</sup> In a Second Act<sup>4</sup> of Uniformity in 1552, a changed form of Common Prayer was imposed upon the people. This act also prescribed penalties against

<sup>1</sup> See G. & H. pp. 358 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See Wakeman, "An Introduction to the History of the Church of England." Rivington, London, 1897, p. 274 ff.

<sup>3</sup> "The Condition of Morals and Religious Belief in the Reign of Edward VI." By the Rev. Nicholas Pocock. *English Historical Review*, July, 1895, pp. 417-445.

<sup>4</sup> G. & H.. 369 ff.

all laymen who should refuse to attend services at which the form was used. Thus action against recusants began.

Under the lead of Cranmer, meantime, a confession of faith, catechism and primer were being compiled. Forty-two articles of faith were published by royal authority in 1553. These subsequently became the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church.

All these changes, however, rested upon most insecure foundations. The mass of the people were not ready for any radical alterations in the doctrine or polity of the Church, and when King Edward VI was succeeded by Queen Mary in 1553, an intense Roman Catholic reaction was brought about quite easily. The first proclamation of the queen, published August 18, 1553,<sup>1</sup> announced the faith which she held, and expressed the wish, which every one knew was her will, that her loving subjects should quietly embrace it. This proclamation was quickly followed by her first Act of Repeal,<sup>2</sup> in which acts passed during the reign of King Edward VI were repealed, and the religious constitution of the realm was practically restored to that obtaining when King Henry VIII died in 1547.

<sup>1</sup> G. & H., p. 373 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 377 ff.



But the queen did not pause here. Late in 1554 her second Act of Repeal<sup>1</sup> was passed. This restored the ecclesiastical conditions of the year 1529. England was a Roman Catholic country. Protestant heretics were exiled, imprisoned and executed. It seems very unlikely that there were any congregations organized according to the model of King Edward VI, which maintained their existence in England secretly during the reign of Queen Mary. The line of development which we must follow is to be taken up in those cities of the continent to which the Protestant leaders and members of their congregations fled during the Roman Catholic reaction effected by the queen.

Following out this line of development, we find ourselves concerned with the action of one of these congregations which was composed of families who settled at Frankfort-on-the-Main in 1554. They were using in their worship the Prayer-Book of King Edward VI, but did not adhere strictly to all its requirements. They used no surplice, dispensed with the litany, and allowed the people to make no responses after the minister. For this they were taken to task by their English breth-

<sup>1</sup> G. & H., p. 385 ff.

ren settled in Swiss cities, and they defended their practice by claiming that <sup>1</sup> these omissions and changes were exactly in line with those which had been intended by the leaders of the reform movements in England during the reign of King Edward VI, but had been cut short by the changes which came with the accession of Queen Mary. The movement perpetuated by these English exiles in continental cities, therefore, represented the natural development of the Anglican reformation toward a simpler form of worship and greater freedom from Roman Catholic doctrine.

Queen Mary died in 1558. Princess Elizabeth came to the throne. The exiles returned. Again the form of the national religion underwent a change. Queen Elizabeth was conservative and the key-note of her policy was compromise. She desired to be the head of a national church, which should be neither so Protestant as to repel her Roman Catholic subjects, nor so Roman Catholic that her Protestant subjects would separate from it. Therefore, according to her instructions, the severe language against the pope was stricken out of the litany, and certain vestments which had

<sup>1</sup> The correspondence and an account of the entire trouble is contained in "A Brieff Discours off the troubles begonne at Franckford in Germany Anno Domini 1554." 1575, p. xxi. Copy in Congregational Library, Boston. Reprint, London, 1846, p. xxi.

been abandoned during the reign of King Edward were restored.<sup>1</sup>

Queen Elizabeth's Supremacy Act,<sup>2</sup> passed in January, 1559, repealed the Act of Repeal of Queen Mary, and revived a part of the acts of King Henry VIII and King Edward VI relating to the religious condition of the realm. Immediately after the above came the stringent Act of Uniformity, which restored the Book of Common Prayer, changed slightly from the form in which it had been fixed under King Edward VI. The terms of this act were very strict regarding the use of the Book, attendance at church, and the penalties attending any transgression of the statute.<sup>3</sup> The Prayer-Book was accepted by the majority of the queen's bishops, not because they all thoroughly approved of it as it then was, but for what a part of them hoped to make of it by future changes.

Queen Elizabeth had no sympathy with the type of Calvinism which had been brought home by the exiles from the cities of the continent. She was ready to use their counsel, but she did not propose that these Protestants should carry out the policy which they had endeavored to realize

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth retained the crucifix in her chapel and the use of the cope was continued. This scandalized especially the returned exiles. See Wakeman, pp. 329-333.

<sup>2</sup> G. & H., pp. 442-458.

<sup>3</sup> These are specified in G. & H., p. 459.

at home under King Edward VI, and which they had perpetuated and intensified during their enforced residence in the centers of Protestant thought abroad. Her policy mediated between these Protestants on the one hand and the leaders of her Roman Catholic subjects on the other.

This policy of the queen found its ardent supporters among those who had been loyal to the general cause of the Reformation in England. They formed the Anglican party. On the other hand were those who desired to press forward to still greater reforms both in the doctrine and in the practice of the church. They desired to purify public worship of all the ceremonies which, to them, stood for obnoxious Romish doctrines, of which they were supposed to be rid already. They strove for the elevation in moral character of the clergy and members of the national Church. For this they were named Puritans. The root of this Puritan movement was ethical, not doctrinal. Nothing could be farther from the truth than to imagine that the English Puritans or their Separatist successors were malcontents and incorrigibles, who found it by nature impossible to abide in the same spiritual household with other men. They were champions of righteousness and men of intense ethical earnestness. This was the

prime motive in all their activity. Puritanism was practical, not doctrinal, so far as its initial incentives were concerned. It found a buttress in the theology of Calvin, but it sprang from the ethical passion for a purer life.<sup>1</sup>

The movement which is thus named Puritanism has always been at work in the Church. It manifested itself in the Netherlands before it did in England. Bishop Hooper, who "scrupled" the vestments in the reign of King Edward, was the father of Puritanism in England. But the clear definition of the movement came chiefly from the writings of Thomas Cartwright, Professor in the University of Cambridge, from which position he was ejected in 1571 for so-called erroneous teaching.

Cartwright was a follower of Calvin both in doctrine and in polity. His teaching stood in positive opposition to that of the Anglican party. He held that the State and the Church are independent in administration; that the Scriptures teach an authoritative system of polity, of which the diocesan episcopate forms no part; that the members of the Church ought to have a share in the selection of their officers. The membership

<sup>1</sup> See "Puritanism in the Old World and in the New," by J. Gregory, 1896, p. 2.

of the Church, he taught, is composed of all baptized persons who are not excommunicated, and the duty of the ministry is to train this body of church members to holiness of life. He believed that the magistrate ought to suppress heresy and compel uniformity in worship. The true reformer, he maintained, must remain within the Church, work there for its purification, and never separate from its communion. Separation he held to be a grievous sin. Cartwright was the founder of the party of Presbyterian Puritanism, between which and the Anglican party there was sharp stress throughout the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

Under the strain of this contention each party intensified its emphasis upon its peculiar doctrines. The great opponent of Cartwright, Archbishop Whitgift, sought to maintain simply that episcopacy is the more ancient and desirable form of church government. In 1589, Bancroft maintained that episcopacy is of divine authority, and in 1593 Bilson asserted that episcopacy and apostolic succession are essential to the very existence of the Church. Thus the breach widened. Even the gradual passing away of the common foe, Roman Catholicism, seemed to intensify the strife between Puritan and Anglican.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Williston Walker "A History of the Congregational Churches in the United States," 1894, pp. 19-24.

Puritanism, as outlined by Cartwright, had within itself certain unfulfilled conditions which were inevitably bound to carry some of its followers to the extent of separation from the national church as established by law. It was a policy of ethical and ecclesiastical reformation. This reformation, according to Cartwright, was bound up with the civil power, and it was necessary to wait for the initiative of the civil magistrates in undertaking practical reform. The reformer is by nature a man impulsive in purpose and impatient of delay. The end which he seeks seems to him so righteous and so necessary that he cannot control his zeal while he waits for the slow operation of the elaborate machinery of civil administration. The time was bound to come when men of this stamp would face the question, Has the Anglican Church the power resident within it to reform the abuses which are involved in its present constitution? If the answer to that question were a negative, a second question was bound also to arise: Is it, then, the duty of those who hold fast to the holy character of the members of the true Church to remain in the communion of the Church of England? Cartwright's teaching became a school in which men were trained to advance beyond their teacher. He opened a door which other men

entered who believed him inconsistent because he did not go to the full length of separation.

The first attempt to outline the theory and practice of a separation from the Anglican Church is found in the writings and the work of Robert Browne. It was while pastor of a church of Puritan tendencies in Cambridge, about 1580, that he seems to have become convinced that the Puritan reformation was not thorough enough, and that a more radical change, without waiting longer for help either from the impotent and unwilling magistrates or from the sad minority of faithful clergy, was the sole means of purifying the Church and of avoiding personal sin. He maintained not only that the order of the Anglican Church was unscriptural, but also that the bishops in sustaining it were guilty of sin. This sin became, by participation, the personal sin of every person who remained in the false church, and therefore church relationship was a determining factor in holiness and salvation. To remain a member of the Church of England was to connive at sin and become involved in it. Separation was necessary in order to salvation.<sup>1</sup>

From two small books issued by Browne we

<sup>1</sup> See Dexter, "The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years, as Seen in its Literature," New York, Harper, 1880, pp. 61-128, for the best available study of Browne's work.



gain an outline of his teaching, which may be gathered up under three heads:

I. A Christian church is a company of persons possessing Christian character, and united to God and to one another in the bonds of a covenant. To every such church belong all the powers necessary for self-organization, government and discipline. Such a church is a democracy, under the supreme and immediate headship of Christ, and each member is responsible to Christ for the welfare of the church to which he belongs.

II. But each church is also bound to its sister churches, and is to give and receive aid and counsel whenever these are needed.

III. The Church and the State are independent of each other, and therefore civil magistrates have no right to exercise lordship in spiritual affairs.

These doctrines were so radical that they called out a proclamation in the name of Queen Elizabeth against the books, the possession and circulation of which was so serious a charge that two men convicted of it were executed in 1583.

It remained to be seen whether Browne was a man of sufficient strength to organize an institution which could successfully realize his ideal. Great dangers were bound up with propositions so radical as those which Browne announced.

The true test of his capacity as a leader came when he endeavored to form a congregation upon the basis of those principles. He made the attempt at Middelberg. Disaster attended it. This may not have been due entirely to the inability of Browne himself to control his church. In a company where each man is made the responsible censor of his brother's opinion and conduct the peril is great. Poor human nature is too weak to endure such a strain as that unless there is a masterful personality in control, to temper men's judgments and set a high example of kindness. The principles of Separation called for wise leadership. Browne's congregation went to wreck and he himself, a man of no small ability, and a preacher of far more than ordinary power, was incompetent to control his congregations, even if they had been organized on a model which had less possibility and peril of disruption bound up within it. He finally returned into the communion of the Church of England, and died, an old man, scorned by Puritans and Anglicans alike.

The teachings of Browne were widely circulated. When, in 1610, Joseph Hall wrote in reply to John Robinson, who had claimed that the main positions of the Separatists were not well or commonly known, he said,—

"What Cobler or Spinster hath not heard of the maine holds of Brownisme?"<sup>1</sup>

Thus early Browne's name was given in derision to those who advocated a Separation. They tried in vain to shake it off, but it continued many years as a term of reproach.<sup>2</sup>

The second stage in the development of Separation may also be designated by the name of a man. Barrowism is the general name given to the teachings of Henry Barrow and John Greenwood. After the year 1586 both of these men came into prominence on account of their arrest and repeated examination for ecclesiastical misdemeanors. During their subsequent imprisonment in the Gatehouse and Clink prisons they managed to prepare and smuggle out enough manuscript to fill over nine hundred pages of exegetical and controversial literature. In these books a new statement of the Separatist principle appears.

Barrow and his friends agreed fully with Browne in his attack upon the Anglican Church in respect to the character of its members, its polity and its worship. The duty of Separation was made

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Hall, "A Common Apologie of the Church of England," 1610, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> See the popular conception mirrored in the writings of Shakespeare

"I had as lief be a Brownist as a politician."

—Twelfth Night, iii, 2, 34.

equally imperative. The difference between Browne and Barrow lay in the positive side of their teaching concerning the nature of the true church.<sup>1</sup> The general tendency in the teaching of Robert Browne was democratic. The theories of Barrow must be judged, not only according to the language in which he writes, but also by the practical character of the congregation in Amsterdam which was built upon these teachings. And, while it is not a true judgment which pronounces Henry Barrow aristocratic rather than democratic, without qualification of those terms, it is right to say that the church order which his teaching inspired laid hold of that strong aristocratic tendency which appears in his teaching, and carried it to its logical conclusion in a church whose government was centered in the hands of the church officers. Barrow taught that the members of the church ought to be a "humble, meek, obedient and loving people" toward their true governors, the officers of the church. The body of the congregation, having within itself all the powers necessary for its organization and control, is there-

<sup>1</sup> See "Henry Barrow, Separatist, and the Exiled Church of Amsterdam," by Fred. J. Powicke, Ph.D., London, James Clarke & Co., 1900, for an extensive monograph in which Barrow's work is examined very thoroughly, and the common judgment as to his aristocratic view of the church is rejected.

fore brought into contrast with the body of the elders, who hold their office indeed as a trust from the congregation, but are, nevertheless, in a real sense the church.

On the practical side Barrowism presented the same difficulties that were such a menace in the teachings of Browne. The element of religious espionage in the system was the prophecy of its ultimate failure unless there should be the counter-acting force of sane personal leadership in the church built upon these principles. A church was gathered in London, organized with Francis Johnson as its pastor in 1592, and had a stormy history, both in England and in Holland. In London they were the objects of intense persecution from which they finally fled to Amsterdam. For clearness in description this congregation is generally described as the "Ancient London Church." The story of their trials in Holland is pathetic. We shall meet them later there.<sup>1</sup>

Thus we have outlined the growth of the radical wing of the Puritan movement into the Separation, on the constructive side of which we find a fundamental difference in church theory between democracy and aristocracy. We shall take up this movement later when we turn to the history of a

<sup>1</sup> See Dexter, "Congregationalism as Seen," etc., Lecture V.

Separatist congregation which was gathered near Scrooby early in the seventeenth century.

Throughout the reign of Queen Elizabeth the strife between Anglican and Puritan went on. The hopes of the latter had been set upon the successor to the queen, James of Scotland, who came to the throne in 1603. On his way from Scotland to London he was met by a petition, called, from the supposed number of signatures which it bore, the Millenary Petition.<sup>1</sup> The signers of this petition were "the ministers of the gospel in this land, neither as factious men affecting a popular parity in the Church, nor as schismatics aiming at the dissolution of the State ecclesiastical, but as the faithful servants of Christ and loyal subjects to your majesty, desiring and longing for the redress of divers abuses of the Church."

The petition, therefore, did not come from Brownists with a dangerous tendency toward democracy in their doctrine, nor from Separatists with the direful trend toward Separation in their practice. It represented the conforming Puritans. The scope of their "humble suit" was that these offensive things, among others named, might be removed or changed: the cross in baptism; confirmation; use of the cap and surplice; "longsomeness of

<sup>1</sup> Copy in G. & H., pp. 508 ff.

service''; profanation of the Lord's Day; the use of the ring in marriage; bowing at the name of Jesus. They also begged that no popish doctrine be taught; that only men able to preach be made ministers; that non-residency of ministers be no longer permitted. They urged reforms in the matter of administering the pastoral office, particularly regarding plural benefices and fees. And they pleaded for a juster exercise of the functions of church discipline.

The petitioners declared themselves ready to show that the abuses mentioned were contrary to the Scriptures, either in writing, or at a conference to be called by the king.

The king called the Hampton Court Conference at once to meet in January, 1604, for the purpose of consulting in regard to religious changes in the nation. The result of its deliberations was to convince the Puritan party that absolutely nothing favorable to its policy was to be expected at the hands of the new king. His temper became violent under the pressure of the Puritan contention. The Hampton Court Conference was decisive for the hopes of all those ministers who might be still of the belief that the true method of reform was to remain loyal members of the Church of England. The tendency of such a decision would

be either to crush such ministers back into conformity, or to drive them farther forward into open Separation.

Another act in the definition of church order and the royal policy was the results reached by the Convocations of 1603-4. These assemblies, convened by royal warrant, in both Canterbury and York provinces, enacted the canons of 1604, in which we have a clear outline of the order of a state church prescribed for the whole realm and sanctioned by the king.

Thus the first year of the reign of King James was a year of definition. Anglican, Puritan and Separatist alike knew what to expect. The more zealous and earnest Puritans could not feed their hearts on false hopes any longer. Separation was bound to come easier under such conditions.

Let us at this point, therefore, take a brief survey of the church organization which had been sanctioned by Church and king in the Convocation of 1603-4, in order that we may clearly see the ecclesiastical system from which the Separation was made. Only a very brief and general outline can be presented here, but the fundamental principles in the Anglican polity are clearly displayed in these enactments. The title of the book is, "Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiasticall, Treated



upon by the Bishop of London," etc., 1604. The canons number in all one hundred and forty-one, of which twelve are devoted to the Church of England, eighteen to the service and sacraments, forty-six to ministers, and thirty-six to the ecclesiastical courts. The remainder are devoted to miscellaneous matters.

We will now attempt from these sources to construct the general system of the established church order from which the Separatists went out.

The center of the entire system is the royal supremacy in all matters ecclesiastical as well as civil. At least four times each year all preachers, ministers and lecturers are to teach plainly that all authority in religious and civil matters claimed by any other person than the king is abolished, and that the sovereign's power in the realm is the highest under God's. The royal authority is supreme in every department of the kingdom.

The Church of England as established by law in the realm by these canons is a true Church. The test of the true character of the Church is made by applying to it the question, Does it maintain and teach the doctrines of the apostles? The Church of England does this, and is therefore a true Church. Any one who denies this fact is condemned to excommunication and can be restored

only by the archbishop, after repentance and the public revocation of his error by the guilty party.

Since the Church of England is the true Church, separation from it is defined as follows:—

“Whosoever shall hereafter separate themselves from the communion of saints, as it is approved by the Apostles’ rules in the Church of England, and combine themselves together in a new brotherhood, accounting the Christians who are conformable to the doctrine, government, rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, to be profane and unmeet for them to join within Christian profession, let them be excommunicated.”

Ministers who refuse “subscription” are denied the right to take the name of any church not established by law, and whoever asserts that such ministers have this right, or claim that the Church of England is oppressing any such forbidden church, is liable to excommunication.

For doctrine, the Thirty-Nine Articles, agreed upon in 1552, form the authoritative creed of the Church. Excommunication is the penalty prescribed for any one who should affirm that these Articles are in any particular superstitious or erroneous.

The government of the Church in general is administered, under the king, by archbishops, bishops, etc. To affirm that this system is in any

way repugnant to the Word of God, or to deny the validity of the forms used in the consecration of bishops, priests and deacons, renders the person making the affirmation or denial liable to excommunication.

The Church of England is divided into two provinces, at the head of each of which is an archbishop. The Archbishop of Canterbury is the Primate of all England. Next to him is the Archbishop of York.

The second division is the diocese, at the head of which is the bishop, who, in the controversies of the times, is often called the "ordinary." The cathedral church of the diocese is the one containing the bishop's throne. The duties of the bishops and other church officers are outlined clearly. One of the special abuses recognized by the Convocations is the failure of ministers to reside in their parishes. This is taken up and the practice forbidden.

The unit of organization in the Church of England is the parish, of which all baptized persons who are not suspended or excommunicated are members by virtue of their baptism. At the head of the parish is the minister or priest, assisted, if necessary, by one or more curates, who have been ordained either deacons or priests. Upon the

office and work of the ministry the burden of emphasis in the canons is laid. This forms so large a theme in the arguments and attacks of the Separatists, that we must look at the matter somewhat in detail.

No person is permitted to become a candidate for sacred orders unless he shall be at least twenty-three years old for a deacon, and twenty-four for a priest. He must also be able to show the bishop at the time of his ordination that he has a position in the Church ready for him, or that he is in some way provided for. The exception to this rule is Masters of Arts of five years' standing, living at their own expense, or men whom the bishops are sure that they can soon appoint to livings. Furthermore, the candidate must be a resident of the diocese of the bishop who is to ordain him, or else must bring letters from the bishop of the diocese to which he belongs. Either he must have taken a degree at Oxford or Cambridge, or else he must be able to give an account of his faith in Latin and to defend it from the Scriptures. The moral character of the candidate must be vouched for under the seal of Oxford or Cambridge, or by three or four ministers and other persons who have known him for a space of at least three years. Before he can be ordained, he must be rigidly

examined in the presence of the bishop and the assisting ministers, who must be from the candidate's cathedral church, if possible, and if not, from among the preachers of the same diocese.

Certainly it would seem as if the safeguards thrown around the matter of sacred orders were sufficient, according to these canons, to secure for the ministry of the Church men of ability and character. The only loophole through which either ignorant or bad men could slip in would be the failure of the bishops to hold rigidly to the strenuous requirements of the canons. Doubtless this was sometimes the case, for the canons prescribe penalties for those bishops who ordain men for whom there seems to be no prospect of preferment, or who fail to make the necessary examinations.

It will be necessary for us to recall these canons when we come to consider the attack of the Separatists upon the ministry of the Anglican Church.

The canons also carefully safeguard the matter of preferment and the episcopal sanction of ministers. No minister is allowed to pass from one diocese to another and be instituted over a church in the latter, unless he can show the bishop of the new diocese his orders, and give evidence of a good life and pass an examination if required. No man

is to serve as a curate or minister without examination and approval by the bishop or his deputy. Nor is one man permitted to serve more than one church or chapel in one day, unless the chapel is united to the parish church or the bishops have decided that the second church or chapel is unable to sustain a curate.

The work of the ministry covers the general spiritual interests of the parish. But the canons devote special attention to the matter of preaching. This is without doubt inspired by the Puritan attack on this point. A difference is recognized between ministers who are able to preach and those who are not, and special provision is made for the parishes of the latter. Every beneficed preacher is required, either in his own or a neighboring parish, to preach one sermon every Sunday, and in this sermon he is required to "soberly and sincerely divide the Word of truth to the glory of God and to the best edification of the people." If a man in a benefice is not able to preach, however, he is required to provide that sermons shall be preached in his parish at least once a month by preachers lawfully commissioned to perform this service. But it is left to the judgment of the bishop to decide whether or not the living of such a minister will bear the cost of such a supply of a

preacher as is specified above. Here again we note the way in which the administration of the canons rests with the bishops, and must not infer too quickly that, because the canons make these provisions for preaching, the prescriptions were faithfully carried out by the bishops. It is further enjoined that every Sunday when there is no sermon preached, the minister or the curate shall read some one of the prescribed homilies. A minister who cannot preach is also forbidden to attempt to expound the Scriptures. No preacher is allowed to preach without showing his license, and the test of his doctrinal soundness is the Scriptures, the Articles of Religion and the Prayer-Book. Every sermon is to be recorded in a book at the church where it is preached, and the names of the preacher and licensing bishop are required for the record. No preacher is allowed to oppose any doctrine delivered by any other preacher in the same or a neighboring church without the consent of the bishop. Failure to conform to the requirements of the Prayer-Book is to be punished by forfeiture of the license to preach.

Every preacher with a benefice, even if he have a curate, is required to read service and administer the sacraments, at least twice yearly in his parish church. It is strictly forbidden to preach

or to administer the sacraments in private houses, except in cases of the feebleness or the dangerous illness of the inmates. By a private house is meant a house in which there is no legally dedicated chapel. In case a chapel is connected with a house the chaplain is forbidden to administer the sacraments except in the chapel, and then only seldom, in order that the owners of the house may partake of the communion more often in the church.

Inasmuch as some persons had refused to have their children christened, or to take the communion when the minister was not a preacher, a canon charges such persons to cease this refusal upon pain of excommunication, "as though the virtue of those sacraments did depend upon this [the minister's] ability to preach."

The other duties prescribed for the ministry are those which naturally belong to the office, such as christening, which must be according to the rules of the Prayer-Book; burial of the dead, which is to be denied only to those excommunicated or guilty of notorious crimes for which they did not repent; catechizing; preparation of children for confirmation by the bishop; the marriage of persons duly authorized; and visitation of the sick.

A significant canon, in view of the attack made by the Separatists upon the moral character of



many of the Anglican ministers, has to do with the regulation of the conduct of the clergy. The very vices which we find charged against them by John Robinson are here explicitly prohibited. They are forbidden to resort to taverns or ale houses, to drink or riot, to play at cards or dice. They are commanded to live in honest study, to exercise and not forsake their calling.

The final test to which every minister must submit is subscription to certain articles of belief and practice. Any minister coming into a diocese must subscribe to these in the presence of the bishop of the diocese before he may be permitted to perform any of the duties of his office. The thirty-sixth canon sums up so completely the relation which the minister must bear to the church in this matter of subscription, that we give it as it stands:—

“No person shall hereafter be received into the Ministry, nor either by Institution or Collation admitted to any ecclesiastical living, nor suffered to preach, to catechize, or to be a Lecturer, or Reader of Divinity in either Universities, or in any cathedral or collegiate Church, City, or Market town, Parish Church, Chapel, or in any other place within this Realm, except he be licensed either by the Archbishop, or by the Bishop of the diocese (where he is to be placed) under their

hands and seals, or by one of the two Universities under their seal likewise, and except he shall first subscribe to these three Articles following, in such manner and sort as we have here appointed:—

“ I. That the King’s Majesty, under God, is the only supreme Governor of this Realm, and of all other his Highness’ Dominions and Countries, as well in all spiritual or ecclesiastical things or causes, as temporal. And that no foreign Prince, Person, Prelate, State, or Potentate have or ought to have any Jurisdiction, Power, Superiority, Preeminence, or Authority ecclesiastical or spiritual within his Majesty’s said Realms, Dominions and Countries.

“ II. That the Book of Common Prayer, and of ordering of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, containeth in it nothing contrary to the Word of God, and that it may lawfully be used, and that he himself will use the form in the said book prescribed in public prayer and administration of the sacraments and none other.

“ III. That he alloweth the books of Articles of Religion agreed upon by the Archbishops and Bishops of both provinces and the whole clergy in the Convocation holden at London in the year of our Lord God one thousand five hundred fifty and two; and that he acknowledgeth all and every the articles therein contained, being in number nine and thirty, besides the ratification, to be agreeable to the Word of God.

“To these three articles, whoever will subscribe, he shall, for the avoiding of all ambigui-

ties, subscribe in this order and form of words, setting down both his Christian and surname, viz.:

*"I N. N. do willingly and ex animo subscribe to these three articles above mentioned and to all things that are contained in them."*

This is the test of subscription, about which contemporary writing is so full, and which proved such a heavy burden to the Separatists. Every bishop is strictly enjoined to see that rigid subscription is required from every minister of the diocese, under severe penalty in case of any omission. The test is to be constantly in force. If any minister, after having subscribed to these three articles, should fail to use all the forms of worship as prescribed in the Prayer-Book, he is to be suspended from his office and given a month in which to reform his ways. If at the end of that time he does not submit to the requirements of the Prayer-Book, he is to be excommunicated and given one month more for reformation. If at the end of this second month of probation he remains obdurate, he is to be deposed from the ministry.

The canons proceed to take up the matter of plurality of benefice, and seek to guard the church from the danger which is involved in this plainly recognized abuse. But the canons only prescribe that ministers who are allowed to hold more than

one living shall be men of excellent training and ability as preachers; that the livings shall not be more than thirty miles apart; and that the ministers shall reside in each place a reasonable amount of time each year.

The worship of the Church is covered by the canons. There are two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. One of the points which was hotly debated when these canons were adopted was the use of the sign of the cross in baptism. The use of the sign is defended in a long argument of little force, after which the sign is asserted to be no essential part of the ceremony, which might be equally perfect if the sign were not used. It is employed as an accidental part of the sacrament of baptism, and is so to be used by the Church.

The Lord's Supper is to be administered at least three times each year, one of these occasions being at Easter. And every layman is bound to receive it thrice every year, "under the penalty and danger of the Law." In administering the sacrament the minister is to partake first, and the communicants are to receive both the bread and the wine. Among those to be excluded from the communion are persons known to be living in notorious sin, persons at enmity with their neighbors, and officers of the church who have

not presented for prosecution to their bishops such offenders against the church as they are bound by their oath to search out. Also those who refuse to be present at public prayers according to the order of the Church of England, depravers of the Prayer-Book, and persons denying the validity of the ceremonies enjoined in the Prayer-Book are to be excluded.

The Prayer-Book is given a place of supreme importance in all the worship of the Church. To assert that the forms which it prescribes are superstitious, unlawful or inconsistent with the Scriptures, is sufficient ground for excommunication. The ministers are held strictly to all its requirements, without being allowed in the least to diminish the force of its injunctions in their preaching, or to add anything either to its form or matter. So far as the Prayer-Book contains rites and ceremonies, these are obligatory upon every person. To affirm that these ceremonies are wicked or superstitious, or to claim that zealous and godly men may not with good conscience approve, employ and subscribe to them — this is sufficient warrant for excommunication.

The proper clothing for church officers is described in the canons, from the garb of the archbishop to the dress of the poor curate. The sur-

plice is to be worn by every minister while he conducts service. It is to be made with sleeves and provided at the expense of the parish. All questions concerning vestments are to be decided by the bishop or his deputy. Ministers who are university graduates are commanded to wear hoods according to their degrees. Ministers who are not university graduates are allowed to wear upon the surplice, "instead of hoods, some decent tippet of black, so it be not silk."

The sacred days of the Church are many. Besides Sunday, all the holidays announced in the Prayer-Book must be observed. The litany is to be said or sung, not only on these days, but upon every Wednesday and Friday, whether these were holidays or not.

This gives us, from the official Canons of the Church, a fairly distinct picture of the organization to which conformity was required from every minister by the law. To enforce this requirement there was developed a system of judicial machinery which became a tyranny. We do not need to survey these courts before which those who refused subscription suffered. Enough has been seen already to show how strong the tests of conformity were, and how easy it might be to become an ecclesiastical offender.

## II

### SEPARATIST CONGREGATIONS





## CHAPTER II

### SEPARATIST CONGREGATIONS IN GAINSBOROUGH AND SCROOBY

It is not possible at present to trace with certainty any line of causal connection between the congregation or congregations formed about London on the principles of the Separation and the organization of similar companies in the north of England. They were both due to the earnest preaching of the Puritan ministers and their insistence upon a holy life. This brought about a radical change of character and begot a zeal for reformation in their converts. When the possibility of that reformation was thus sought by these men, and when the simple model of church organization in the New Testament was studied, it appeared to them that the government of the Church by bishops and the use of the ceremonies prescribed by the Prayer-Book were alike inconsistent with the New Testament description of the Church. They were, in each case, men who were seeking a higher expression of the religious life, and they came to the common conclusion that the expres-

sion could not be realized through the church as then constituted by law in England.

In the year 1849 Rev. Joseph Hunter for the first time identified the exact region in which were gathered the Separatist congregations from which the "Pilgrim Fathers" of America came. In 1854 the full results of his investigations were published.<sup>1</sup> He determined, from references in the writings of Bradford, that the village of Scrooby was the chief center of the movement, the area of which is now quite specifically defined.

The general character of the district in which these Separatist congregations were organized would not seem at first to promise much in the way of intellectual development. It was open country, flat and uninteresting, with villages dotting the landscape here and there, and only a scattered population. It was isolated from the large cities. The Great North Road ran through it; but this, Arber says, was "a mere horse track, and not fenced in; so that the traveller needed a guide, to prevent his wandering out of the way."<sup>2</sup> In spite of all that one would naturally suppose

<sup>1</sup> "Collections concerning the Church or Congregation of Protestant Separatists formed at *Scrooby* in North Nottinghamshire, in the time of King James I: the Founders of New Plymouth," by the Rev. Joseph Hunter. London, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> "Story of the Pilgrim Fathers," p. 51.

to have been true concerning the ignorance of the peasantry, the narrowness of their world, and their indifference to the life of the spirit, there had been a unique religious character about the district. Previous to the Reformation there had been many houses of the different religious bodies in the region; nearly every monastic order was represented. Many of the leading families there were ardent Roman Catholics and suffered severe hardships when the state religion was changed. Corresponding to this loyal support of the old faith by the old aristocracy was a singular activity on the part of the Puritan preachers, to which the organizations in Gainsborough and Scrooby were due.<sup>1</sup> The work of laymen was no less conspicuous. Bradford tells how William Brewster's great religious service to the country in which he lived consisted both in his personal example of a godly life and in the effort which he made to procure good preachers in all the villages round about. This was his practice before ever he had thought of Separation. He was not the only earnest, high-minded man in the region. The whole section was good soil for the harvest of religious freedom. It is a singular fact that the pioneers of the English Baptists are Smyth and Helwisse of Gains-

<sup>1</sup> See Hunter, "Collections," pp. 24 ff.

borough; that the Congregationalists are proud to claim as the founders of their polity in its modern form Robinson, Brewster and Bradford, all of this district; that later, from the rectory at Epworth, in this very region, went forth John and Charles Wesley, the great leaders of the Methodist movement. There must have been a local temper which made this possible. Arber's attempt to apply the "crass ignorance of the country peasantry of England" to this district is unwarranted in the face of what has been done for true religion by its inhabitants.

The protest of earnest preachers and zealous laymen against the Anglican Church as established by law involved them in trouble. After a time they organized into churches. The first of these organizations probably took place in the city of Gainsborough, about the year 1602, and the later leader of the movement and pastor of the church was John Smyth. The sole authority for this early date, however, is Secretary Morton in "New England's Memorial." Bradford does not give the date, and, in general, the author of the History seems to have had little regard for the necessity of definite chronology. He is not so much inaccurate as he is careless or inadequate. Prince

followed Morton in regard to the date, and Hunter and Dexter both seem inclined to accept it.<sup>1</sup>

So far as it rests upon the official connection of John Smyth with the congregation, the date 1602 is probably too early. Edward Arber seems to have established the fact<sup>2</sup> that John Smyth was a conforming minister of the Church of England in Lincoln on March 22, 1605. It was not until after that date that we are to connect him with the Separatist congregation at Gainsborough. But this is not clear proof that the congregation itself was not organized before that date, as Arber stoutly claims it could not have been.<sup>3</sup> That claim cannot be established until we are sure that the organization of the congregation and the election of its officers were contemporary. We shall discover clear proof that there is a difference in the Separatist theory between a church "gathered," that is, united in covenant, and a church organized fully by the election of its officers. The second stage was not necessary in order that a congregation might be called a "church." There is no sufficient reason why Morton's date should not be accepted as accurate for the organization by covenant of this Separatist company.

<sup>1</sup> So Dunning, "Congregationalists in America," p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> "Story of the Pilgrim Fathers," pp 133, 134.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. D., p. 48.

John Smyth, a Cambridge man, became identified with the congregation at some time following the year 1602, and we generally connect his name most closely with its fortunes in England and Holland. Smyth decided for the Separation after a period of nine months spent in study and doubt over the question. His congregation was called a company of "tradesmen" by their opponents. He carried his ideas of the Separation to the farthest extreme, and maintained that it was necessary to withdraw, not only from all public worship or communion with the Anglican Church, but even from all acts of religious fellowship with its members, such as reading the Scriptures or joining in private prayer.

Persecution swiftly followed the gathering of the Gainsborough congregation and they were compelled to flee into Holland, which was the refuge then for all who suffered for non-conformity in England. The emigration was gradually effected, and they reached Amsterdam in October or November, 1606.

The second congregation probably never formally split off from the church at Gainsborough, although at the beginning the two seem to have been part of one movement. Scrooby is a little village which was, at the close of the sixteenth

century, one of the post stations on the Great North Road from London to Berwick. After the accession of King James I this road became more important, owing to the necessity of frequent communication between the two courts. Consequently the postmaster became a man of considerable local prominence and income. The office in Scrooby was held by William Brewster from April 1, 1590, to September 30, 1607.

Also in Scrooby there was a manor house belonging to the Archbishop of York, which Archbishop Sandys had granted to his son Samuel, under whom William Brewster, postmaster, held it. We have observed already the practical character of the religion of William Brewster. It was natural that, when such a man became a Separatist, he should open his house to his brethren and lend his personal influence and activity to their cause. This is exactly what he did. A new center was formed in the old manor house at Scrooby. Doubtless many who came to meet and worship there had formerly gone the longer distance to Gainsborough. Brewster entertained them when they came, at no slight expense to himself, and continued his practice as long as they remained in England.

The members of the congregation came from the villages of Austerfield and Scrooby and from

the adjacent country so far as there were isolated houses. At the beginning they gathered on Sunday for counsel, fellowship and, probably, for some simple form of worship, walking to and from the manor house and proving the hospitality of its owner. This fellowship, however, grew naturally to assume a form of organic union. The picture which we have of the formation of the little church comes from one of the later antagonists<sup>1</sup> of John Robinson, who says:—

“Is this so strange to John Robinson? do we not know the beginnings of his Church? that there was first one stood up and made a covenant, and then another, and these two ioyned together, and so a third, and there became a church, say they.”

The simplicity of this action is striking. There was no bishop and no council of churches. There was no test of creed. The covenant was made between man and man, and its terms were very plain. This is precisely the action to which William Bradford refers when he says<sup>2</sup> that these Separatists “joyned themselves (by a covenant of the Lord) into a church estate, in ye fellowship of ye gospell, to walke in all his wayes, made

<sup>1</sup> “[John Murton] A Description of what God hath predestinated concerning Man,” etc., 1620, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> “Of Plimoth Plantation,” 1893, p. 13.



known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavours, whatever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them."

This simple organization did not imply a lack of personal leadership. The very opposite was true. From the beginning strong men were associated with the Scrooby congregation.

First was Richard Clyfton. To his preaching, perhaps, the very inception of the movement goes back. Bradford says that he was "a grave and reverend preacher, who by his pains and diligence had done much good, and under God had been the means of the conversion of many."<sup>1</sup> He also tells us that Clyfton was "sound and orthodox" to his end. He was the rector of Babworth, between six and seven miles south of Scrooby, and nine miles from Austerfield, from which village William Bradford sometimes walked on Sundays to hear him preach. It may be a personal reminiscence when Bradford says of him, "Much good had he done in the country where he lived, and converted many to God by his faithful and painful ministry, both in preaching and catechizing." It was a precious fruit of his ministry indeed if the choice spirit of William Bradford was one that he led into the Christian life. He was probably dis-

<sup>1</sup> "Of Plimoth Plantation," p. 14.

placed by the enforcement of the canons of 1603-4, and became one of the members united by covenant with his fellow Separatists in Scrooby church.

William Bradford, later governor of Plymouth, and author of the priceless history "*Of Plimoth Plantation*," now preserved in the State Library of Massachusetts at Boston, was one of the younger members of the church, and did not assume his position of prominence until after the emigration to America. He was born in the village of Austerfield, three miles from Scrooby, and baptized there March 19, 1589 [1590]. His connection with the Scrooby congregation was probably brought about through his association with Richard Clyfton while the latter was preaching in Babworth, before he was silenced by the ecclesiastical authorities.

The leader of the movement who stands out most clearly at the beginning, on account of his connection with the manor house and his practical service to the cause, is William Brewster. He was a man of great individual power and singular personal worth. He was a printer rather than a writer when the time for the defense of the Separation came. We have no book preserved from his pen, and so there is no source from which to reach an estimate of his strength as a writer. His great service to the Separation did not lie in the

written defense of its principles, or in the preservation of its history. He was the central figure in the early history of the Scrooby congregation and always one of its strongest members and most judicious leaders.

Neither Clyfton, Bradford nor Brewster, however, is the person who assumed the final leadership of the Scrooby company. Any one of them might, perhaps, have saved the little church from the wreck which was made so sadly by the congregations of Browne, Johnson (the Ancient London Church), and Smyth, who pushed on to Holland ahead of the Scrooby brethren. There was another man who would prove himself great enough to master the Separation and embody it for the first time in a successful organization. This was John Robinson, the subject of this biography.



III

JOHN ROBINSON  
UNTIL HE JOINS THE  
SEPARATIST CONGREGATION



## CHAPTER III

### THE LIFE OF JOHN ROBINSON UNTIL HE JOINS THE SEPARATIST CONGREGATION AT SCROOBY

THERE is no contemporary biography of John Robinson; nor has the attempt been made to treat with any degree of completeness from the original sources the course of his thought, the contribution he made to his age, or the personality of the man himself. Governor Bradford has given us a few paragraphs in his famous "Dialogue" regarding Robinson; there are also a few scattered contemporary opinions concerning him. But these are not adequate to enable us fully to trace the course of events with which he was so actively associated. Nor are his writings strongly autobiographical. He never boasts of what he has done; he keeps far out of sight in his controversies.

But, while we are thus limited on the objective side, we shall find that Robinson is constantly revealing himself on the subjective side. He discloses his heart; he lays bare the motive forces of his life. It is a character singularly simple and consistent; it is the soul of a man to be loved which

we discover in these old controversial pamphlets and sometimes dreary discussions. Our chief sources are those passages in his preserved books where John Robinson writes out of his very heart.

The year of his birth is determined from an entry in the records of the University of Leyden. On September 5, 1615, by permission of the overseers, he was admitted to the university, being then thirty-nine years of age and supporting a family. Therefore he was born in 1575 or 1576. He died in Leyden in 1625. His life covered a span of a half century, the last quarter of the sixteenth and the first quarter of the seventeenth. The period of his life which concerns us most closely was contemporaneous with the reign of King James I of England, 1603-1625.

The place of his birth we are not able as yet to determine surely. The conjecture is that he was born in Gainsborough. There is at least a probability that this is true. Dr. Henry M. Dexter searched the parish records, which are in very imperfect condition, and was not able to discover any record of his baptism there.<sup>1</sup> This, however, is negative evidence only. Hunter<sup>2</sup> notes the fact

<sup>1</sup> See "Congregationalism as Seen, etc." p. 359, note 1.

<sup>2</sup> See "Collections, etc.: the Founders of New Plymouth," London. 1854, p. 93.



that prominent dissenters during the reign of King Charles II were Robinsons of Gainsborough. In the time of his greatest perplexity he turned toward Gainsborough as one might be drawn toward the home of his youth.

Certainly we may be right in imagining the boyhood years of the lad spent in this old town, a picture of which George Eliot gives in "The Mill on the Floss." Gainsborough is St. Oggs, and the gray antiquity and sweet charm of the place are revealed in her description:—

"It is one of those old, old towns, which impress one as a continuation and outgrowth of nature, as much as the nests of the bower-birds, or the winding galleries of the white ants; a town which carries the traces of its long growth and history like a millennial tree, and has sprung up and developed in the same spot, between the river and the low hill, from the time when the Roman legions turned their backs on it from the camp on the hillside, and the long-haired sea kings came up the river and looked with fierce, eager eyes at the fatness of the land. It is a 'town familiar with forgotten years.' The shadow of the Saxon hero king still walks there fitfully, reviewing the scenes of his youth and love time, and is met by the gloomier shadow of the dreadful heathen Dane, who was stabbed in the midst of his warriors by the sword of an invisible avenger, and who rises on autumn evenings like a white mist from the

tumulus on the hill, and hovers in the court of the Old Hall by the river side — the spot where he was miraculously slain in the days before the Old Hall was built. It was the Normans who began to build that fine old hall, which is like the town, telling of the thoughts and hands of widely-sundered generations; but it is all so old that we look with loving pardon at its inconsistencies, and are well content that they who built the stone oriel and they who built the Gothic facade and towers of finest small brickwork, with the trefoil ornament and the windows and battlements defined with stone, did not sacrilegiously pull down the ancient, half-timbered body, with its oak-roofed banqueting hall."

Gainsborough, then, with its long history and its busy trade, may have been Robinson's birth-place. If it was, his boyhood was spent in a town where there were not only active interests to engage him, but all the charm of romance and venerable story to kindle his imagination.

There have been other conjectures as to his place of birth, none of which seems so probable as this. John Browne<sup>1</sup> thinks it quite possible that he was the son of John Robinson, D.D., an arch-deacon and precentor of Lincoln Cathedral, and that he was born in Lincoln. There is hardly so much probability in this as there is in the con-

<sup>1</sup> "The Pilgrim Fathers of New England and their Puritan Successors," London, 1895, p. 95.

jecture that he was born in Gainsborough. Still less probable is the suggestion of Gordon in the "Dictionary of National Biography" that Robinson was born in Saxlingham.

Concerning his childhood we really know nothing. There is a reference in one of his "Essays" to the harmful indulgence of mothers and grandparents toward children.<sup>1</sup> From this Dr. Henry M. Dexter<sup>2</sup> thought it might be possible to infer that he lost his father early in life. But there is not enough evidence to warrant this conclusion.

We are equally uninformed concerning his family or the social station into which he was born. But there seem to have been considerable periods of time after he had become involved in trouble with the church authorities when he existed with no visible means of support. Also he printed many books which must have cost him large sums of money, since their sale was forbidden at home. And in Leyden he was concerned in the purchase of a large property, the so-called John Robinson house. His writings never hint at the pinch of poverty. These facts would seem at least to indicate that he was not from a poor family. This is, to be sure, negative evidence. It is not with-

<sup>1</sup> Works, 1: 246.

<sup>2</sup> "Congregationalism as Seen, etc." p. 360.

out value, however. The pinching of poverty generally betrays itself somewhere in a man's writings or it is discoverable in his actions. There is nothing of the sort in evidence in Robinson's case.

The first records which we have in England concerning him are from Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, from which we learn that he was admitted in 1592 and was fellow in 1598. There is, curiously, the record of another John Robinson on the rolls of Emanuel College, Cambridge, but this is clearly concerned with another person than the subject of this biography.<sup>1</sup>

The Corpus Christi record describes Robinson as from the county of Lincoln, and Masters adds the information that this was the John Robinson who later lived in Holland. In 1831 a new edition of Masters' History of Corpus Christi College (originally published in 1749) was issued, in which

<sup>1</sup> The record on the register of Emanuel College is "John Robinson, entered as sizar, March 2d, 1592; took his M. A. 1600 and B. D. 1607." This cannot refer to our Robinson, who could not have taken his B.D. degree from Cambridge so late as 1607, for he had decided for the Separation before that time. This entry misled Young (see "Chronicles," p. 452) into supposing that this Emanuel graduate was the later Separatist. Also James Savage in "Gleanings from New England History" (Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll. Series 3, Vol. 8, pp. 248-249) makes the same error. Gregory in "Puritanism," p. 211, says that Robinson was a fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge; on p. 214 he says that Robinson "graduated at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, in 1592, and became a Fellow probably in 1599."

the editor, Dr. Lamb, refers to this record, and says that Robinson succeeded a Mr. Morley as fellow in 1598 and resigned his fellowship in 1604. He also says that Robinson was from Nottinghamshire. No satisfactory authorities are given for these assertions, and they add nothing trustworthy to the scant store of our reliable information. The change in the matter of counties may be explained easily if Robinson was born in Gainsborough, as the Trent is the dividing line between Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire.

Robinson entered the University of Cambridge during the splendor of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Four years before, the Lord's winds had blown and the Spanish Armada had gone to its destruction. The menace of Philip the Catholic had been in vain; the danger of a return to the policy of Queen Mary was averted. In contemporary life, George Chapman was thirty-five years of age; Christopher Marlowe, twenty-eight; Shakespeare, twenty-eight; Ben Jonson, nineteen; Sir Walter Raleigh and Edmund Spenser, forty; Francis Bacon, thirty-one; Richard Hooker, thirty-eight; and Joseph Hall, eighteen. Thomas Cartwright was in prison in the Fleet, London. William Perkins was preacher at St. Andrews. Henry Jacob was twenty-nine; Robert Browne, forty; Francis

Johnson, thirty; Henry Ainsworth, twenty-one. Barrow and Greenwood were spending their last year of life on earth in the Fleet prison. This was the general situation.

Cambridge University as a whole was strongly colored by Puritanism. The atmosphere of the place was liberal, and there certainly was considerable laxity in the enforcement of rigid uniformity of worship. The leaders of the Separation were almost universally Cambridge men.

Corpus Christi, or Benet College, was one of the smaller of the Cambridge group. Its Master when Robinson entered was Jegon, who was also Vice-Chancellor of the University. It may have had about one hundred and ten students at this time. Robert Browne, his coworker, Harrison, and John Greenwood had all been students at this college.

We have no particulars concerning the course of John Robinson's student life in Cambridge so far as its objective details are concerned. He took a degree at the university, for Joseph Hall writes to him, "You have twice kneeled to our Vice-Chancellor, when you were admitted to your degree."<sup>1</sup> Whether this was the master's or the bachelor's degree we cannot determine. In 1598 or 1599 Robinson became Fellow of the university, and

<sup>1</sup> "Common Apologie," p. 90.

probably soon after that took up his work as a curate in the Church of England.

It was while he was a member of the church established by law in England that his personal religious life began. He speaks of it in the defense of the Separation which he made against Richard Bernard,<sup>1</sup> as follows:

"We do with all thankfulness to our God acknowledge, and with much comfort remember, those lively feelings of God's love, and former graces wrought in us, and that one special grace amongst the rest by which we have been enabled to draw ourselves into visible covenant, and holy communion. Yea with such comfort and assurance do we call to mind the Lord's work of old this way in us, as we doubt not but our salvation was sealed up unto our consciences, by most infallible marks and testimonies, which could not deceive, before we conceived the least thought of separation; and so we hope it is with many others in the Church of England, yea, and of Rome also."

"And for our personal conversion in the Church of England we deny it not, but do, and always have so done, judge and profess it true there."

Religion was a matter of personal relationship between Robinson's soul and God, rather than an official relationship in an ecclesiastical institution. He described it in the terms of the prevailing Calvinistic theology as the bestowment upon him

<sup>1</sup> See Works, 2: 65, 75.

of a special divine grace. For the individual this was enough to enable him to unite himself into covenant relations with God. This change of life Robinson described reverently. It was radical. It embraced his whole being. From that time on he was a "new man in Christ Jesus." If Robinson entered the university at the age of seventeen it is hardly likely that an experience of which he speaks so profoundly would have come into his life before that age. We are probably safe in ascribing the change which Robinson calls his conversion to the period of his university career. It was a time peculiarly adapted to a fundamental examination of his personal relations to God, and for the settlement of the purposes which should thereafter control his life. We shall discover that he was very sensitive to personal influences, and that the greatest decisions of his life were reached through personal contact with men whose opinion and character he respected. So far as we can determine the forces which operated upon him in Cambridge to transform the motives of his life, they emanated chiefly from William Perkins. He was the catechist of Christ's College, and lecturer at St. Andrew's Church. Robinson always held Perkins in the highest esteem, speaking of him as "one of our own



nation, of great account, and that worthily, with all that fear God, however he were against us in our practice.”<sup>1</sup> Robinson also wrote and published a supplement to Perkins’ “The Foundation of the Christian Religion,” which book, he says, fully contains “what every Christian is to believe touching God and himself.”<sup>2</sup> The supplement published by Robinson takes up the subjects peculiar to Separatist teaching only. Hence Robinson found in the teachings of Perkins those fundamental truths necessary to religious conversion, as he conceived it.

Robinson took orders in the Church of England. In 1610 he classes himself with John Smyth and others of the Separation as having “renounced our ministry received from the bishops, and do exercise another by the people’s choice.”<sup>3</sup> In thus entering upon his life’s work he was following out the native bent of his character and taking up a duty which he loved. He was a pastor rather than a controversialist, and when, later in life, he was drawn into the intense and often bitter discussions which attended the Separation, he wrote,

“The preaching of the gospel is a most excellent thing, and the fruits of it far better than those of Eden, and oh! how happy were we, if, with ex-

<sup>1</sup> Works, 2: 446.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 3: 426.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 2: 405.

change of half the days of our lives, we might freely publish it to our own nation for the converting of sinners." <sup>1</sup>

This first slight glimpse which we get into the heart of the young minister shows us a man of simple, noble purpose, the whole trend of whose life is religious, seeking through the avenues of preaching and pastoral care to give himself lavishly to the weal of his fellow men. He is such a spirit as we should expect to find expressing himself through the avenue of the Christian ministry.

The general nature of his short term of pastoral service in the Church of England we can construct from what we know of the man's nature, and from a few slight contemporary witnesses. It was a time filled with earnest, faithful service to his parish.

Neal says: <sup>2</sup> —

"Mr. John Robinson was a Norfolk divine beneficed about Yarmouth, where being often molested by the bishop's officers, and his friends almost ruined in the ecclesiastical courts, he removed to Leyden, and erected a congregation upon the model of the Brownists."

If Robinson was a curate or rector at Yarmouth, this parish never occupied the place in his heart

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 37.

<sup>2</sup> "History of the Puritans," 1: 244.

that was held by another place where he worked, Norwich. Henry Ainsworth, who probably came from the region of Norwich himself, says in his "Counterpoyson":<sup>1</sup>—

"Witness the late practice in Norwich, where certain citizens were excommunicated for resorting unto and praying with Mr. Robinson, a man worthily revered of all the city for the graces of God in him (as yourself also, I suppose, will acknowledge) and to whom the care and charge of their souls was erewhile committed."

Here Ainsworth definitely describes Robinson's position as having established his reputation in the city of Norwich itself. Hence, it would seem that the sphere of his labor was near Norwich or in the very city.

The same conclusion must be drawn from the preface of one of Robinson's minor writings, "The People's Plea for the Exercise of Prophecy," in which he dedicates his treatise "To my Christian Friends in Norwich and thereabouts."<sup>2</sup> In the course of this dedication he says, "And for you, my Christian friends, towards whom for your persons I am minded, even as when I lived with you, be you admonished by me." The entire tone of this preface and dedication is like the

<sup>1</sup> Edition of 1642, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> Works, 3: 285 ff.

tenderer letters of St. Paul to the congregations which he had gathered, but from which he had been compelled to separate. Robinson still bore his people upon his heart, rejoiced in their success, and sorrowed with their trials and persecutions.

Let us look briefly now at the general religious character of this region about Norwich. Norfolk had received the great influx of refugees who had been driven out of the Netherlands during the period of Roman Catholic persecution. These immigrants represented the best of the Flemish weavers, and they brought prosperity particularly to Norfolk and London. The city of Norwich was thereby advanced to a position of commercial leadership second only to London. In 1587 the Dutch and Walloons formed a majority of the city's population. But they brought more than their frugality and skill in the textile arts. They were Protestants; many among them belonged to the despised Anabaptists. It was among these people that the Lollard movement took deepest root and spread most rapidly. Norfolk was the chief sufferer in the persecutions during the reign of Queen Mary. Norwich was early counted as a Puritan stronghold. There Robert Browne had gathered his first church, a

few members of which probably remained and perpetuated their organization as late as 1603.

This was the general character of the sphere in which Robinson, coming from the strong Puritan atmosphere which he evidently had breathed in Cambridge, began his ministry. The former Master of Corpus Christi College, Jekon, became Bishop of Norwich in February, 1602. Robinson soon became involved in trouble with the ecclesiastical authorities, probably on account of failure to conform in the use of the ceremonies prescribed by the Prayer-Book. The trouble at first was not serious. He was subject to the same annoyance and discipline that Richard Bernard, and other Puritan preachers, met occasionally. The whole difficulty might have been obviated had he been willing to conform fully to the requirements of the Prayer-Book. As he retorts to Bernard, "We might have enjoyed both our liberty and peace, at the same woeful rate with you and your fellows"—that is, by conformity.<sup>1</sup>

But Robinson never complained of what he had suffered. Nor did he move forward because he was driven by resentment. He seems to have moved slowly, and he shrank from taking the step of final separation until he had exhausted every

<sup>1</sup> See Works, 2: 54.

expedient which would enable him to remain in the Church of England and still preserve his convictions regarding its communion, polity and worship.

He evidently sought to free himself from the censure which he had received. Joseph Hall says to him, "As for absolution, you have a spite at it, because you sought it, and were repulsed."<sup>1</sup>

In what way Robinson thus sought to set himself right with the church authorities we do not know. But the next step which he took, probably after he had been suspended from the ministry, certainly before he had either left Norwich or decided fully for Separation, was to attempt to secure a chaplaincy to some nobleman, or to serve in a private chapel or hospital. Here the conditions of conformity were not so rigid, and it was a frequent expedient with the Puritan preachers. He applied, therefore, for the Mastership of the hospital at Norwich, but failed to secure it. While this matter was pending, Robinson probably remained, a suspended minister, in Norwich. His attitude is probably fairly represented by Joseph Hall, who says:—

"Tell us, how long was it after your suspension and before your departure, that you could have

<sup>1</sup> "Common Apologie," p. 77.

been content, upon condition (that is, the appointment to a chaplaincy or the hospital) to have worn this linen badge of your 'man of sin?' Was not this your resolution when you went from Norwich to Lincolnshire after your suspension?"<sup>1</sup>

There is another reference to the same fact by Hall, in the "Common Apologie"<sup>2</sup> as follows:

"Before that God and his blessed Angels and Saints, we fear not to protest, that we are undoubtedly persuaded, that whosoever wilfully forsakes the Communion, Government, Ministry, or Worship of the Church of England, are enemies to the Septré of Christ, and Rebels against his Church and Anointed: neither doubt we to say, that the Mastership of the Hospital at Norwich, or a lease from that city (sued for with repulse), might have procured that this Sep. fr. the Com. Govt. & Worship of the Ch. of Eng. should not have been made by John Robinson."

The time soon came, therefore, when Robinson found that a restoration to his clerical office was impossible; his friends were suffering heavy losses by fines from the courts; and there was, at least near Norwich, no place in which he could exercise his ministry without full conformity. He went, he tells us, to many places where he hoped to find satisfaction to his "troubled heart." There is a

<sup>1</sup> See Hanbury, "Historical Memorials," 1: 198.

<sup>2</sup> Page 113.

tender pathos in the few words with which Robinson refers to his experience at this great crisis in his life. All his desires were set toward ministry in the church. He longed to preach; he yearned to carry forward his task of pastoral care in a parish. The testimony of Bastwick<sup>1</sup> is probably trustworthy as showing the real ground of Robinson's decision:—

“If I can speak thus much in the presence of God, that Master Robinson of Leiden, the pastor of the Brownist Church, there told me and others, who are yet living to witnesse the truth of what I now say, that if he might in England have injoyed but the liberty of his Ministry there, with an immunity but from the very Ceremonies, and that they had not forced him to a subscription to them, and impressed upon him the observation of them, that hee had never separated from it, or left that Church.”

He did not reach the decision easily. He went to many places seeking help in his trouble. Among these, he visited Cambridge. He had come to the point where he saw plain arguments warranting separation; but he did not yet take the step. Reaching Cambridge he went to hear a forenoon lecture by Lawrence Chadderton, who had been Master of Emanuel College since its foundation

<sup>1</sup> “The Utter Routing of the Whole Army of all the Independents & Sectaries,” 1646, cxvii.



in 1584, and was a famous lecturer. The lecture which he heard was to the effect that "the things which concerned the whole church were to be declared publicly to the whole church and not to some part only." This seemed to him to confirm one main ground of the Separatist teaching, that is, "that Christ hath given his power for excommunication to the whole church." In all the parish assemblies he could find no church having this power or so exercising it.

In the afternoon of the same day he went to hear a lecture by Paul Baynes, the successor of William Perkins in St. Andrews. The theme of this lecture also fitted the questioning mood of the hearer. It was "the unlawfulness of familiar conversation between the servants of God and the wicked." Some years afterwards Robinson was able to reproduce the argument of this lecture in brief outline, showing that he took notes of it or listened most intently. In private conversation with Baynes soon afterward he questioned the lecturer as to whether his position did not necessitate a separation in spiritual matters of the righteous from the apparently wicked, even in the parish assemblies.

The influence of these Cambridge men upon him was very strong. He does not give us any

details concerning his movements from Cambridge to Gainsborough. All we know is that he finally appeared in more or less intimate connection with a Separatist congregation which had been formed there. If Gainsborough was his early home it is quite natural to account for his appearance there. He had become a Separatist during the time after he left Norwich.

Let us turn now to the subjective history of Robinson's decision for the Separation. We have a fairly satisfactory record of it here and there in his writings. The first impression that we receive concerning it is that the whole mental change is the natural result of those forces which we have found working upon him in his environment. His experience is not to be explained as the result of a solitary struggle. The lone agony and the new vision which had been experienced by Luther were not the way in which Robinson came to his final position. As Mareks says of John Calvin,<sup>1</sup> "he was penetrated slowly by the new spirit; he did not need to build for himself his own way to knowledge;" Luther had done this for himself and for all men.

At the outset Robinson was a member of the State Church, and his ambitions were toward its

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Coligny*, Vol. 1: p. 232.

ministry. So far as the doctrines of that church were concerned he held them without dissent. Like Barrow, he made a distinction between the "faith" and "order" of the Church of England. Of the former he made no question. All the difficulty he experienced was with the latter.

The general influences of Cambridge we have noted. It must have been while here that he began to read books written in defense of the Separation, "the taste of which," he says, was "sweet as honey unto my mouth."<sup>1</sup> But he did not go to the extreme of Separation. The personal influence of men like Perkins held him firmly in check. Here we discover one of the determining traits of his character, his thorough respect for the learning and judgment of others. Indeed, this becomes at times almost an element of weakness with him. He found it necessary to apologize for the fact that he did not follow out his very first convictions to their logical conclusion in Separation by saying:—

"The very principal thing, which for the time quenched all further appetite in me, was the over-valuation which I made of the learning and holiness of these [Cambridge men, such as Whitaker, Perkins, Cartwright, and others] and the like persons, blushing in myself to have a thought of

<sup>1</sup> Works, 2: 51.

passing one hair breadth before them in this thing, behind whom I knew myself to come so many miles in all other things."

So he began his ministry. The theoretical life of the student was exchanged for the practical life of the pastor. Theories concerning church government came to the test of practical use. It was a question as to which form of polity would enable the church to realize its ideal of a communion of saints. This was the Calvinistic conception which Robinson held concerning the church: it was a body of men and women who gave visible signs of the spiritual change known as regeneration. With this conception of the church the young minister, a man of ethical earnestness, encountered the parish system of the Church of England in a region whose atmosphere was permeated with radical thought concerning the true order of church government.

This was a new stage in Robinson's experience. The question of theory became a question of practice. At first the ceremonies were a rock of offense to him. But now he faced the question, Could the church, as organized under the parish system, effect its own purification? That purification was necessary in order to a true church. If the Church of England was powerless to this end, then

some other form of church government was imperative. The whole question was open again, this time from another point of view. Again there was the same sense of weight to be given to the opinions of other men; but the final court of appeal was not human opinion; it was the Scriptures. Robinson tells the story himself briefly:—

“Yea, and even of late times, when I had entered into a more serious consideration of these things, and, according to the measure of grace received, searched the Scriptures, whether they were so or no, and by searching found much light of truth; yet was the same so dimmed and overclouded with the contradictions of these men and others of the like note, that had not the truth been in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones (Jer. 20:9) I had never broken those bonds of flesh and blood, wherein I was so straitly tied, but had suffered the light of God to have been put out in mine own untruthful heart by other men’s darkness.”

Therefore, convinced by practical experience that the “order” of the Anglican Church was incapable of realizing the ideal of the church as the communion of saints, and sure that the Scriptures prescribed another “order,” in which government by bishops formed no part, Robinson followed the light of his new conviction and became

a Separatist. He cast in his lot among his brethren at Gainsborough. We shall now follow him as he moves forward quickly to a secure position of leadership among them.

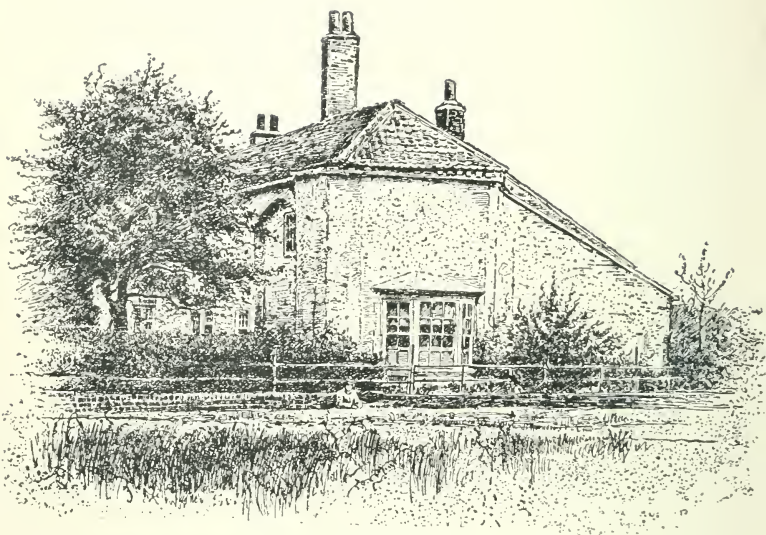
IV

THE SCROOBY CONGREGATION  
AND THEIR LIFE AT AMSTERDAM









SCROOBY MANOR

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EMIGRATION OF THE SCROOBY CONGREGATION TO AMSTERDAM AND THEIR LIFE THERE

THE gathering of the Scrooby congregation in the old manor house could not go on without attracting the attention of the officers of the Church of England, who were compelled to alertness by the severe penalties which the canons of 1603-4 pronounced against those who failed to present non-conformists for punishment. The Separatist ministers were silenced, the people who sympathized with them were subjected to the contempt of their fellows, and finally the heavy hand of the law was laid upon them. They were cited before the courts and life was made a burden for them. They endured it patiently for years.<sup>1</sup>

The most earnest of the Puritan ministers in the vicinity were not at all unwilling to see the schismatic movement crushed out by drastic measures, and there are witnesses to the fact that a few of them were personally ready to bear a hand in it. In 1600 Francis Johnson had written,

<sup>1</sup> See Bradford, "Of Plimoth Plantation," Boston, 1898, p. 12.

"not the Prelates alone, but you also [i.e. the zealous Puritans] have wittingly and willingly your hand in our blood."<sup>1</sup> The strife between the Puritan preachers and the Separatists in the neighborhood became sharp. One of them, Richard Bernard, according to the testimony of John Robinson,

"did separate from the rest an hundred voluntary professors into covenant with the Lord, sealed up with the Lord's Supper, to forsake all known sin, to hear no wicked or dumb ministers, and the like, which covenant long since you have dissolved, not shaming to affirm you did it only in policy to keep your people from Mr. Smyth."<sup>2</sup>

This shows how sharp the collision was between the men who had advanced to the pronounced positions of Puritanism, and the men who were carrying out those positions to their full logical conclusion. It was a struggle for life between the two sorts of congregations.

So, subjected to a cross-fire from the alert Anglican officials on the one side and the exasperated Puritan preachers on the other, the Separatists in Scrooby met such persecution as to make their life almost unendurable. Then they turned longing eyes to Holland. The conditions of religious

<sup>1</sup> "An Answer to Master H. Jacob his Defence," 1600.

<sup>2</sup> Works, 2: 101.

toleration which obtained there were well known; it was accessible by ship from such ports as Hull and Boston; and there was before them for their encouragement the example of the Ancient London Church and John Smyth's congregation.

But it was one thing to reach their decision to emigrate, as Bradford says they did "by joynte consent," and quite another to carry out their plans. It was against the laws of the realm for any one to leave the ports of England without the king's consent. Just why such a law should be enforced against the poor Separatists, of whom the church authorities were glad to be rid, and whose offenses made them the legitimate objects of banishment, is hard to see. It was enforced, however, and so the Separatist leaders were compelled to make secret bargains with sea captains and to pay exorbitant rates for passage.

The first attempt was made by "a large companie" of the Scrooby congregation, who bargained with a captain for the exclusive use of his ship. He agreed to meet them at a specified time and place and to take them and their goods to Holland. This captain was an Englishman, and the place of meeting was near Boston.

The date of this enterprise can be determined with tolerable accuracy from the official records

concerning William Brewster. The declared accounts of Sir John Stanhope for wages of postmasters on the road between London and Berwick contain the amounts paid to William Brewster from April 1, 1594, until they ceased September 30, 1607. We can be certain that Brewster did not yield his official position, which involved so vitally the whole Separatist interest in Scrooby, until he was compelled to do so by openly joining in the emigration. Therefore the first movement toward Holland probably took place in October and November, 1607.<sup>1</sup>

The perfidy of the English captain, however, involved it in disaster. He delayed his coming beyond the time agreed upon, thus involving the poor people in great anxiety and expense. Then he took them on board and betrayed them all to the officers. The Boston officials who seized the would-be exiles treated them harshly, took them to the shore in open boats, searched and rifled them, and made them a public spectacle in the town. The magistrates, however, seem to have been more lenient with them. They were, indeed, committed to prison, whence they could not be released without the consent of the Privy Council.

<sup>1</sup> The whole matter of Brewster's relation to the Scrooby post-office is worked out in Arber, "Story of the Pilgrim Fathers," pp. 71-86.

This permission came within the course of a month, when all were released and sent home with the exception of seven, who were kept in prison and bound over to the assizes for trial.

Who these seven were we cannot tell. Doubtless Brewster was openly connected with the movement and probably also Robinson, Clyfton and Bradford.

In the spring months of 1608 another attempt was made by a considerable company, including many who had failed in the Boston effort, and others who had not before ventured upon the dangerous enterprise. This time they entrusted themselves to a Dutch captain, who agreed to meet them at a meadow on the shores of the mouth of the river Humber between Hull and Grimsby. The women and the goods were sent ahead in a small boat; the men were to meet them by land. But either the small boat was a day too early or the Dutch captain a day too late, and the small boat put into a creek, where she grounded. The next morning the ship came and took a part of the men on board; but before the women and goods could be taken from the small boat, which was still grounded, the officers came, the Dutch captain set sail, and the poor emigrants were divided. The men on board the ship suffered an intensely

stormy passage of two weeks before they finally reached Holland. The officers were left with a company of women and innocent children on their hands, whom they could hardly punish and were finally glad to release. Thus the second effort of the emigrants failed.

They seem to have learned wisdom from these disasters. They saw that any effort to escape in a body was bound to be futile. The nucleus which escaped with the Dutch captain were already in Holland and thus could aid their brethren from that side. Therefore they escaped, a few at a time. In the picturesque words of Bradford,—

“they all gat over at length. Some at one time, and some at another; and some in one place and some in another: and met together again, according to their desires, with no small rejoicing.”<sup>1</sup>

Such were some of the trials through which the Separatists passed in their effort to reach Holland. The results of it were twofold. The arrest of so many people at Boston and Hull awakened discussion, and brought the Separation more and more to popular attention. And then the hardship through which the people passed sifted out the weak and faint-hearted. Twice the Pilgrim Fathers were thus sifted; once, when they removed

<sup>1</sup> “Of Plimoth Plantation,” p. 21.



from Scrooby to Amsterdam; again, when they made the emigration from Leyden to Plymouth. They were men of sturdy stuff.

The Scrooby brethren were compelled to move to Holland slowly. Not all of them went over. In 1614 Robinson referred to the members of his congregation still remaining in England.<sup>1</sup> Among the last to leave were Robinson, Brewster and ‘other principall members.’ This was the natural thing under the conditions. Robinson carried out the same plan in the later emigration from Leyden to America, remaining in Holland with the weaker members of his church, and planning to go to America so soon as he should be able to leave.

Among the last to leave Scrooby was Richard Clyfton. By this we are able to determine the date when the Scrooby congregation finally gathered in Amsterdam. For, in the family Bible of Richard Clyfton’s son Zachary, there occurs this entry:—

“Richard Clyfton, with his wife and children, came to Amsterdam, in Holland, August 1608.” We may be quite sure that Clyfton was among the leading members of the Scrooby company who were the last to come over from England. Hence, the time occupied by this effort to reach Holland was from about October 1, 1607, to August, 1608.

<sup>1</sup> See Works, 3: 102.

Thus the Scrooby brethren found themselves at last together in Amsterdam. It was a city in which there was large freedom in religious matters. Andrew Marvell wrote,

“Hence Amsterdam, Turk-Christian-Pagan-Jew,  
Staple of sects, and mint of schism grew;  
That Bank of Conscience, where not one so strange  
Opinion but finds credit and exchange.”<sup>1</sup>

And, in an open letter to John Robinson, which probably reached him soon after he arrived in Amsterdam, Joseph Hall says of the city, “Lo! there a common harbour of all opinions, of all heresies if not a mixture.”<sup>2</sup> And it is probably true that, at this time, “you might understand more of England at Amsterdam than at London.”<sup>3</sup>

On reaching the city, Robinson found several congregations of English-speaking people who were allowed freedom of worship by the magistrates. There was a Scotch Presbyterian church, whose minister, Rev. John Paget, wrote “An Arrow against the Separation of the Brownists” in 1618. This book gives evidence that he knew quite intimately the history of the Separatist congregations in the city.

<sup>1</sup> “Satires. Character of Holland,” p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Robinson’s “Answer to a Censorious Epistle,” Works, 3: 403.

<sup>3</sup> See Mullinger, “Introduction to English History,” p. 318.

The Ancient London Church had been in Amsterdam, passing through a stormy period of existence, since 1597. In his book, "The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers," Arber makes a severe arraignment of this church on the ground of the immoral character of its members. His indictment rests upon the trustworthiness of certain sources which surely are open to question on that point, and it is to be doubted if the character of this Ancient London Church is as black as he paints it. It is, however, a sad story of family and church wrangling at the best. The year during which the Scrooby brethren resided in Amsterdam was a period of repressed hostility between the factions in the Ancient Church. The old troubles were still alive, and this fact was evidently clear to Robinson, who was as far-sighted an observer of men as he was an ardent lover of peace.

The other congregation, of which John Smyth was pastor, may have numbered among its members some of the very neighbors of the Scrooby Church in England. At the beginning the Gainsborough company probably worshiped with the Ancient London Church; Smyth was a restless soul, who could not be at peace long under the most favorable conditions. He soon made a point of conscience of minor matters, and withdrew from

the fellowship of the Ancient Church. Finally he became a Baptist, was cast out of his congregation, and the storm in his church was at its height. This condition of things was intolerable to a man of Robinson's temper.

Meantime, what was the condition of the Scrooby church in Amsterdam? It has been maintained sometimes that the Scrooby brethren were united with the Ancient London Church while in the city. Joseph Hall, in his "Common Apologie of the Church of England," calls Francis Johnson, pastor of the Ancient London Church, the "pastor" of John Robinson. This would imply that Robinson was a member of the Ancient Church. Nothing can be inferred from Hall, however, concerning the real situation in Amsterdam. He probably knew only that the congregations from the vicinity of Gainsborough had emigrated, and supposed that they were united with the older congregation. Much more light is thrown upon the matter from Bradford's statement that when the Scrooby church prepared to move from Amsterdam to Leyden, and Richard Clyfton chose not to go with them, they dismissed him to the Ancient London Church. This action would not have been taken if the Scrooby church had not maintained separate existence during the Amsterdam sojourn.

Probably the Serooby church met for worship, perhaps together with the Ancients, in a large and gloomy building, which had been a convent, and stood in the street that still bears the name of the Brownists' Alley, from the fact that the English Separatists met there.

We have avoided up to this point any discussion of the question of Robinson's official relation to the Serooby church. Now it must be taken up.

At the very beginning we are brought face to face with considerable confusion in regard to the matter. There are at least two sets of opinions.

The first is that the officers of the church were chosen in Serooby before the emigration, and that Richard Clyfton was the pastor and John Robinson the teacher. This is claimed with varying accents of certainty by Morton Dexter,<sup>1</sup> Arber,<sup>2</sup> John Brown,<sup>3</sup> Goodwin,<sup>4</sup> and Dunning.<sup>5</sup> Walker<sup>6</sup> thinks that the greater age and pastoral experience of Clyfton make it likely that he was chosen pastor rather than Robinson; but it may have been the reverse. He quotes Bacon also as

<sup>1</sup> "The Story of the Pilgrims," 1894, pp. 80, 84.

<sup>2</sup> "The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers," 1897, pp. 29, 54.

<sup>3</sup> "The Pilgrim Fathers of N. E.," 1895, p. 127.

<sup>4</sup> "The Pilgrim Republic," 1888, pp. 25, 26.

<sup>5</sup> "Congregationalists in America," p. 73.

<sup>6</sup> "Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism," p. 83.

saying that Clyfton was pastor and Robinson teacher.

On the other hand, the relative offices are reversed by Hunter,<sup>1</sup> who is followed by Henry Martyn Dexter.<sup>2</sup> Hanbury<sup>3</sup> is generally confused. These writers, however, place the organization in Scrooby before the emigration.

Ashton,<sup>4</sup> also, in the introductory memoir to Robinson's "Works," thinks that Clyfton was chosen the pastor of Scrooby church, and that Robinson was unofficially associated with him. He holds that Robinson never was formally called to the pastorate until Scrooby church reached Leyden. This is probably the ground upon which the author of the article on Robinson in the "Dictionary of National Biography" states that Robinson was "publicly ordained" pastor after Scrooby church reached Leyden.

In all this conflict of opinion there seems to have been too little effort to get at the sources, which are limited and obscure enough at the best, in the writings of Robinson himself, and in Bradford.

The first reference in Robinson's writings which

<sup>1</sup> "Collections," &c., 1854, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> "Congregationalism as Seen, etc." p. 317. "The True Story of John Smyth," p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> "Historical Memorials," 1: 28n., 185, 272.

<sup>4</sup> pp. xxi and xxx.



SCROOBY MANOR HOUSE (Distant View)





we will consider is from his "Defence of the Doctrine propounded by the Synod of Dort," printed in 1624, where he says,—

"And for me, do they not know in their consciences that I was ordained publicly upon the solemn calling of the church, in which I serve, both in respect of the ordainers and ordained?"<sup>1</sup>

The second reference is from the concluding words of the preface to Robinson's treatise, "Of Religious Communion," 1614, from which it is clear that the rigid Separation was the reason why Robinson could not unite with Smyth, and the same matter was brought up when he was chosen pastor.

"I was," he says, "by some of the people with him [Smyth], excepted against, when I was chosen into office in this church. Indeed afterwards finding them of other churches, with whom I was most nearly joined, otherwise minded for the most part, I did . . . remit and lose of my former resolution."<sup>2</sup>

Now this points almost unmistakably to the year spent in Amsterdam. For the arguments in favor of the rigid separation in Robinson's book, "Justification of Separation from the Church of England," must have been brought into shape

<sup>1</sup> Works, 1: 463-464.

<sup>2</sup> Works, 3: 103.

either during the last part of his sojourn in Amsterdam or soon after he reached Leyden. It was during the year in Amsterdam also that he was most closely in contact with other churches, to the personal influence of which he ascribes the great change in his ideas. In Amsterdam, also, it would have been most natural that an objection to him might have come from members of John Smyth's company.

From Robinson let us turn to Bradford. He says that "besides other worthy men," there were in the Scrooby Church, "Mr. Richard Clyfton," "Mr. John Robinson, who afterwards was their pastor for many years," "also Mr. William Brewster . . . who afterwards was chosen an elder of ye church."<sup>1</sup> Here Clyfton is not called pastor, which would be a strange omission, inasmuch as the official relation borne to the church by both Robinson and Brewster is mentioned. Bradford is as provokingly indefinite as Robinson in his use of the term "afterwards."

There is another reference to Clyfton in Governor Bradford's "Dialogue," in which he says,

"He belonged to the church at Leyden; but being settled at Amsterdam, and thus aged, he was loath to remove any more; and so when they

<sup>1</sup> "Of Plimoth Plantation," 14.

removed, he was dismissed to them there, and there remained until he died."<sup>1</sup>

We have referred to this testimony of Bradford as indicating that the Scrooby church maintained a separate existence in Amsterdam. It would seem very strange, however, that Clyfton should be referred to simply as "belonging" to the Leyden church if he had been their pastor either in Scrooby or in Amsterdam.

But there is a still more definite statement in Bradford's "History." He says:

"Now when Mr. Robinson, Mr. Brewster, & other principall members were come over, (for they were of ye last, & stayed to help ye weakest over before them,) such things were thought on as were necessarie for their settling and best ordering of ye church affairs. And when they had lived at Amsterdam aboute a year, Mr. Robinson, their pastor, and some others of best discerning," etc.<sup>2</sup>

This seems pretty conclusive evidence. Bradford does not speak of this as a further or more complete settling of the church affairs, but refers to it as the first definite organization. When the last of the Scrooby brethren are leaving England, Robinson is a "principall member" only. But, while they were passing through the period of

<sup>1</sup> See the Volume "New England's Memorial," Boston, 1855, p. 354.

<sup>2</sup> "Of Plimoth Plantation," p. 22.

"aboute a year" in Amsterdam, Robinson seems to acquire the title of pastor, by which title he is thereafter known by Bradford.

Still further conclusive is the petition, to which we shall refer soon, for permission to settle in Leyden, which is headed in the name of "*Jan Ro-barthse* [John Robinson], minister of the Divine Word." This petition was acted upon February 12, 1609, previous to which date John Robinson must have been made a minister. He had, as we have seen, renounced his ordination in the Church of England. Therefore, before February 12, 1609, he must have been ordained by the Scrooby church. But in August, 1608, he was only a principal member of that church.

Therefore, we believe that the Scrooby church, gathered in and about the English hamlet of that name, was first organized with officers in Amsterdam by the choice of John Robinson as pastor, somewhere between August, 1608, and February, 1609.

Is there anything inconsistent with this condition in the principles of the Separatists? They made a distinction between the church "gathered" and the church fully organized and administered by its officers. According to the teaching of Robinson, whenever two or more faithful people

separate from the world and unite by covenant into the fellowship of the gospel, they form thereby a true church, having all the power of Christ to choose and ordain their officers. This is the "church gathered." The officers are the natural agents through whom the powers resident within the church are exercised, and officers ought to be chosen for the full settlement of church order. But, without officers, a church has the power to receive members, to excommunicate those found deserving the penalty, and to hold services for edification of prophesying and exhortation.<sup>1</sup> The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper could not be enjoyed without officers, however.

There is nothing in that fraternal and informal life in Scrooby which demanded perfection of organization by the choice of officers. It was a company of men and women gathered under conditions similar to those under which the earliest companies of Christian believers gathered. They needed most of all a meeting-place where, in a simple service, they might edify one another and fortify the weaker members to endure persecution. When they reached Amsterdam these conditions changed. They needed to take their place as a fully organized church along with the other Eng-

<sup>1</sup> "Justification of Separation," 2: 235.

lish-speaking congregations in the city. Hence, the conditions of the two locations give antecedent probability to the very action which we have concluded did take place, the organization of the church with officers for the first time in Amsterdam.

The transition from the country life of England to the confusion of a cosmopolitan city like Amsterdam was a startling change for the Scrooby church. They were able, however, to find the means of livelihood there more readily than they could have done in a city that was not a seaport. So far as the matter of self-support and freedom of conscience were concerned they had found Amsterdam admirably suited to their necessities. There were other causes which made the place untenable for permanent residence by a man whose "vehement desire for peace" and passion for righteousness were as strong as these motives were with John Robinson. There was something in the general moral condition of the city which led him to fear for the welfare of his congregation. He was obliged to admit "the hellish impieties" of the city of Amsterdam during his time of residence there. The greatest reason, however, which induced him to seek another place of residence for his church was the hopeless condition of the sister

churches in the city. He was unable to do anything to pacify the factions in Smyth's company; he saw the immediate prospect of renewed hostilities in the Ancient Church. So the new pastor, with his best counselors, began to look about for another and a better environment.

The significance of this fact we must not fail to observe. The history of the Separation up to this time exhibits loyalty to conviction and clear definition of principles. But the one thing lacking was a leader, wise, far-sighted, and strong enough to take these principles, involving the elements of danger that they did, and so embody them in a practical enterprise that the true meaning of the Separatist theory would be evident. Browne had failed; Barrow had failed; Johnson had failed and was still failing; Smyth was making a miserable spectacle of his congregations in Amsterdam. The Separation seemed doomed to complete disaster unless a new champion should appear.

We have evidence from Robinson's writings that he realized keenly the dangers involved in the principles of the Separation.<sup>1</sup> He believed that the fundamental convictions of the Separatists rested upon a deeper knowledge of the real teachings of the Scriptures, a larger freedom in

<sup>1</sup> See Works, 3: 99, 100.

their application, and a more abundant zeal for their embodiment in an institution, than the principles underlying any other religious order. This knowledge, freedom and zeal, however, if unwisely employed by the Separatists, Robinson told them very plainly would inevitably result in the very contentions for which their foes condemned them and which he deplored. But peace is not a sign of knowledge; the peace of the church was never so great as when it was in the very midst of the deepest, darkest and densest ignorance of popery. Knowledge must be guarded with special watchfulness lest it engender strife. So must zeal "be tempered with much wisdom, moderation, and brotherly forbearance." And only those who enjoy liberty know how hard it is to use it aright. There is something in freedom which begets strife unless this danger is resolutely mastered.

This keen analysis of the dangers in the Separation was not an academic exercise on Robinson's part. He recognized these perils. He acted in view of them. And at no point in his career are his foresight and sound judgment more in evidence than when he decided that it would be impossible for him to realize the ideal of the Separation in the environment of Amsterdam.



We are not sure of all the reasons that determined him to seek Leyden, but one of them surely was the fame of the great University, which was one of the strongest in Europe at that time. The disadvantage of the smaller city as a place of residence on the practical side was perhaps overbalanced by this. It was necessarily more difficult for the Separatists to support themselves in Leyden than it would have been in Amsterdam.

They petitioned for leave to settle in the following form, which is recorded, perhaps somewhat freely, in the language of the Clerk<sup>1</sup> in the Leyden Court Registers:—

“To the Honorable the Burgomasters and Court of the City of Leyden: With due submission and respect: JAN ROBARTHSE, minister of the Divine Word, and some of the members of the Christian Reformed Religion, born in the Kingdom of Great Britain, to the number of one hundred persons, or thereabouts, men and women, represent that they are desirous of coming to live in this city, by the first of May next, and to have the freedom thereof in carrying on their trades, without being a burden in the least, to any one. They, therefore, address themselves to your Honors, humbly praying that your Honors will be

<sup>1</sup> The phrase “in this city” would indicate either this, or that the petition was the work of some of Robinson’s company then resident in Leyden.

pleased to grant them free consent to betake themselves as aforesaid."

The Court acted on this petition on February 12, 1609, and declared that "the coming of the memorialists will be agreeable and welcome."

Two points are worthy of note. The first is that, if Robinson reached Amsterdam in August, 1608, at about the same time with Clyfton, and planned the removal to Leyden early in February, 1609, the space of six months suffices for him to come to a clear knowledge of the Amsterdam conditions and determine upon the new plan.

The second is that the Scrooby brethren state that they are in such financial condition or masters of such trades that they will be no public burden. We know, however, that they were not rich, and that the struggle was a severe one for them. We may conclude, therefore, that Robinson had already organized his congregation for mutual help in some way, and may infer a beginning of those practical enterprises for the common good of the congregation which we shall see taking definite shape later, and which make the Scrooby church quite unlike the other Separatist congregations of the time in the saving common sense which they exhibited.

Before leaving Amsterdam Robinson wrote and

published the first tract that we have preserved from his hand. There is this difference to be noted between the Separatist movement in and about London and that in the region of Gainsborough: while the leaders of the former wrote and published a great deal, the latter movement produced no literature, so far as we know. One of the most romantic episodes in the history of the Separation is the manner in which the imprisoned leaders of the Ancient London Church prepared the copy, smuggled it to Holland and secured the publication and distribution of their books.<sup>1</sup> One reason why this was possible was doubtless the ease with which London could communicate with the continent.

The brethren in Gainsborough and Serooby, on the other hand, probably made no attempt at the written defense of the Separation. At least we have nothing preserved in the literature of the movement there. Robinson only began to publish when he had reached Holland.

It was a time when there was no such thing as freedom of the press in England. Printing was carried on chiefly in London, and was possible elsewhere at only five places. In London the ownership and use of type and a printing-press

<sup>1</sup> See page 19.

by persons not meeting the conditions of this ownership was a crime punished by imprisonment. These conditions were that, first of all, they should have attained a certain rank in the "Company of Stationers"; but, among these, the master printers alone were allowed to have hand printing-presses. In May, 1615, there were but nineteen printing-shops for private printing in all London, at the head of each one of which was a master printer. But these nineteen men controlled only thirty-three hand-presses. These presses were locked up every night, and the work in each shop was carefully investigated every week by officers of the "Company of Stationers." Every book was required to be licensed by a representative of the Church and by one of the wardens of the Company of Stationers before it could be printed. Therefore, every book was under complete control of bishop and king.<sup>1</sup>

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that we have nothing from the leaders of the Separation about Gainsborough in the way of printed writings. It is remarkable that we have so much from the imprisoned Separatists in London.

In Amsterdam, however, Robinson was free.

<sup>1</sup> See Arber, "Story of the Pilgrim Fathers," pp.18-20.

And he began to write. We shall consider the tract which he published there. and the large treatise which he doubtless began there, in the following chapter.

If the intention of the Scrooby church as expressed in their petition to settle in Leyden was carried out as regards time, they probably reached their new home about the first of May, 1609. Here John Robinson spent the remainder of his life and did his noble work. To this work we shall now turn our attention.



V

THE SEPARATION AS DEFINED AND  
DEFENDED BY ROBINSON





## CHAPTER V

### THE SEPARATION AS DEFINED AND DEFENDED BY ROBINSON

JOHN ROBINSON was a Separatist. He reached his decision after a time of intense struggle. Having become convinced that the Separation ought to be made, he became the resolute definer and defender of the truth as he saw it. That truth had been taught by Robert Browne and by Henry Barrow with different degrees of emphasis laid upon one phase or another of it. Robinson was called into controversy with the antagonists of the Separation and made his peculiar contribution to the history of the movement as his predecessors had done. It was a significant contribution. It was made in the face of opposition from both Anglican and Puritan writers. The sources which we shall use are the brief reply which he (Robinson) made to the Anglican, Joseph Hall, and the most ambitious of his works, the "Justification of Separation,"<sup>1</sup> against the Puritan, Richard Bernard. We shall not dwell

<sup>1</sup> This treatise occupies the entire second volume of Robinson's Works as published in three volumes. It will be cited in the footnotes of this chapter simply by the page to which reference is made.

upon the detailed arguments, which are often tedious and sometimes shallow; but we will take up the outline of the Anglican Church order as we have studied it briefly from the Canons of 1603-4, display the general scope of Robinson's attack upon it, and then exhibit the positive and constructive side of his work in his conception of the true church according to the New Testament model.

It was sometime during the year 1608 that Joseph Hall, an able minister of the Church of England, and later one of her bishops, who had learned something of Browne's doctrines while in Middelburg, and had also heard of the Separation around Gainsborough, addressed a letter to John Smyth and John Robinson as the "Ringleaders" of the movement. John Robinson replied to this letter by "An Answer to a Censorious Epistle," which is preserved in the reply to it made by Hall under the title, "A Common Apologie of the Church of England." Robinson wrote the reply to Hall's letter while he was in Amsterdam, and also sent it out from that city. It is a tract which interests us chiefly from the fact that it is the first writing of Robinson which remains to us, and that it shows him in the light of a thoroughgoing Separatist.

The second source exhibits fully the position of Robinson as a champion of the Separation. It is entitled, "A Justification of Separation from the Church of England against Mr. Richard Bernard his Invective, entitled The Separatist's Schisme." It was begun at Amsterdam during the year of residence there, and finished and published in Leyden in 1610. Rev. Richard Bernard, in reply to whose book, "Christian Advertisements and Counsels of Peace," it was written, was a vicar of the Church of England, whose parish was Worksop, in the neighborhood of Scrooby, and who had personally known both Smyth and Robinson there. At times he had seemed on the point of becoming a Separatist, but he had always returned to conformity to the Church of England. Yet he was a Puritan, and wrote arguments against the ceremonies which were imposed upon the church by the Prayer-Book.

From these two sources, therefore, we may expect a fair view of the arguments for the Separation as they were urged against both the Anglican and the Puritan by John Robinson.

From the perspective of the present, this debate over the reasons for the Separation cannot appear to us so important or so interesting as a later

controversy concerning the extent of Christian communion which we shall take up. But at the time this large book on the Separation was Robinson's most important work. He probably rated it as the greatest service which he performed for the cause he loved and defended. And, if we seek sympathetically to enter into it, we shall find the study of its arguments and propositions a matter of vital interest.

Before we turn to these let us notice the temper of the time in respect to controversy. When Robinson took up his pen in defense of the Separation it was not for the pleasure of a scholastic exercise. He had suffered; so had his people. Those were not soft times. It was an age of invective and unsparing rebuke because it was a time when opinions were a matter of life and death. Men did not make apologies as a preliminary exercise to the process of decapitation; they struck quickly and fiercely, intending to give fatal blows. This is the quality of argument which we find in these discussions. Robinson's temper is gracious, and his terms are generous, in comparison with many of his contemporaries. But there is no little harshness in his method as he deals with his opponents.

On the negative side, let us review his attack

upon the Church of England, as we have already studied it at the close of Chapter I.

So far as the royal supremacy is concerned, Robinson is an Englishman, loyal to the core to the king. He says,

“The King indeed is to govern in causes ecclesiastical, but civilly, not ecclesiastically, using the civil sword, not the spiritual, for the punishing of offenders.<sup>1</sup>

Hence the king is not the head of a national church, holding a unique position. If he is a church officer, he is called to that office and may be deposed from it by the church. He is, then, only a ruling elder and inferior in position to a teaching elder. Robinson does not discuss the question at length, since he is far more deeply concerned with the office of the bishop. But, in spite of his loyalty to the monarch, his denial of the validity of a national church sweeps away the doctrines of the royal supremacy, as it was commonly held.

Then he denies the apostolic character of the Church of England. He shows how different the method of gathering the apostolic Church was from that by which the Church of England was brought together. When Christ and the

<sup>1</sup> Page 273.

apostles gathered the true Church of the New Testament,

“they did not by the co-active laws of men shuffle together good and bad, as intending a new monster or chimera, but admitted of such, and none other, as confessed their sin and justified God, as were not of the world, but chosen out of it.”<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament Church was composed of “saints.”

Against this argument both Hall and Bernard replied that, while this was doubtless true, there were yet wicked members in the churches even in the apostles’ day, and this fact did not make them false churches. The abuses at Corinth did not make it necessary for the true Christians in Corinth to separate from the church there and form a new one of their own.

We come here to a critical point in the entire Separatist position. Robinson takes it up fully in his replies to both his opponents. He admits that there were wicked members in the apostolic churches, and that this fact did not make it necessary for those who were holy in those churches to separate from them. But, when this is made a warrant for remaining in the Church of England,

<sup>1</sup> Page 121.

there is this essential difference to be observed, which makes the Anglican argument of no value. These apostolic churches had the power resident within them, the power of Christ given to the members of the church, to purify themselves and to reform abuses. But in the Church of England this power exists no longer, having been usurped by the bishops and the church thus robbed of that which makes it a true church, that is, the power to reform itself. We must not lose the force of this argument. It has an ethical basis; it roots in the demand for righteousness. For the early Separatists it was decisive. It was not the mingling of good and bad in the national church, but the fact that, under the episcopal order, the power of self-purification lodged by God with the people was lost, which drove John Robinson into Separation.

What, then, was the real ground of this Separation, against which the canons pronounced such censure, and concerning which Joseph Hall wrote to Robinson, "even murders shall abide an easier answer than separation"? Ainsworth had held that the separation was from the corruptions in the church and not from the corrupt church. Hall thought at the outset that this was Robinson's position, and, therefore, did not

class him as a thorough Separatist. But Robinson takes the ground in his "Answer" that the separation is not from certain corruptions which are manifest chiefly in the ceremonies, but from the church itself, which is essentially corrupt because of the wickedness within it which it is impotent to reform. Hall, therefore, in his "Apologie" brands Robinson as a complete Brownist. This position is elaborated in the discussion with Bernard. It is in reality another statement of the old principle of "connivance at sin." When Bernard asks why Robinson cannot remain within that church where his conversion took place, and expend his zeal there for its purification, the answer is that Separation from that church is necessary in order to avoid personal sin. He says,

"But this I hold, that if iniquity be committed in the church, and complaint and proof accordingly made, and that the church will not reform or reject the party offending, but will on the contrary maintain presumptuously and abet such impiety, that then, by abetting that party and his sin, she makes it her own by imputation and enwraps herself in the same guilt with the sinner. And remaining *irreformable* either by such members of the said church as are faithful, or by other sister churches, wipeth herself out of the



Lord's Church-roll, and now ceaseth to be any longer the true church of Christ.'"<sup>1</sup>

Exactly this condition, Robinson maintained, existed in the Church of England as it was then constituted. Separation, therefore, was not a form of registering a protest against the ceremonies prescribed by the Prayer-Book or the form of church government by bishops. It was a necessity in order to avoid personal sin. The extent to which the Separation must be carried we will notice later when we consider more fully Robinson's positive teaching.

So far as the creed named in the canons was concerned, Robinson was ready to accept the Thirty-nine Articles, or the older Forty-two. He charged Hall with the fact that erroneous heresies concerning free will were stealing in among the ministers of the Church of England, but he did not enter into any discussion of dogma as distinct from polity. He acknowledged "many excellent truths of doctrine, which we also teach without commixture of error," in the Church of England. But Robinson maintained that the order of the church was an essential part of any body of doctrine. He said:

"Since Jesus Christ, not only as priest and

<sup>1</sup> Page 260.

prophet, but as king, is the foundation of his church; and that the visible church is the Kingdom of Christ; the doctrines touching the subjects, government, officers, and laws of the church can be no less than fundamental doctrines of the same church or kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

And again,

"The order which Christ hath left in the Evangelists, Acts, and Epistles to Timothy and Titus, is a part of the Gospel and the object of faith as much as any other part of it."<sup>2</sup>

It is often said that the entire Separatist contention was concerning polity and not concerning theology, as if, after all, the Separation was made on the ground of an external quibble instead of being based upon something which was essential, involving faith, and utterly necessary to the existence of a true church. Robinson was perfectly clear on this point. Polity was a part of a divinely given body of truth. Apart from any question of the right or wrong of their conviction, it must be clear that the Separation was made by men who believed that church polity was as much an essential part of church doctrine, and as much an object of faith, as the Being of God or the Person of Christ. The question of the true order of the church was not a matter

<sup>1</sup> Page 397.      <sup>2</sup> Pages 22, 287.

of external form or accident; it was fundamental and worth contending for at the risk of life itself.

We will dismiss very briefly Robinson's attack upon the Church of England. The idea of a national church, he maintains, is the attempt to return to the Old Testament order, which has been done away with forever by the institution of the order laid down by Christ and the apostles in the New Testament. In that order there is no trace whatever of the prelatic system employed in the government of the Church of England. "Your grand metropolitans, your archbishops, bishops, suffragans, deans, archdeacons, chancellors, officials, and the residue of that lordly clergy"<sup>1</sup> find no warrant in the simple church order of Christ and the apostles. The parish system is also repugnant to the idea of the church as a communion of saints. "With what conscience," he asks, "can any man plead the saintship of all that godless crew in the English assemblies?" The Anglican worship, too, is false, since the ceremonies of the Prayer-Book have usurped the highest place, and the preaching of the Word, which is the supreme function of worship, is omitted because of the inability of the Anglican ministers in a vast number of parishes.

<sup>1</sup> Page 171.

Robinson's attack, which is often harsh, but generally less venomous than was the custom in his day, is pretty well fortified by citing the witness of men whose books he possessed, or by appeals to his own knowledge of the conditions in such parishes as Worksop.

We have passed hastily the negative side of Robinson's argument, in order that we might devote more space to the positive and constructive teaching which appears everywhere in his writings. For, while Robinson is intense in his controversy, he is not merely destructive. He defends his positions by maintaining positive doctrine rather than by wholesale attack upon his opponents.

Let us look at his conception of the true church. It is drawn entirely from his definition of the perfect model in the New Testament. The exigencies of controversy lead him to emphasize one or another of the elements in the definition at different times; but he preserves it throughout in these general terms:

"A company, consisting though but of two or three, separated from the world, whether unchristian or antichristian, and gathered into the name of Christ by a covenant made to walk

in all the ways of God known unto them, is a church, and so hath the whole power of Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

First, then, the true church is an individual congregation. Robinson bases this claim upon the fact that Jesus and the apostles in the beginning —

“appointed none other true visible churches but particular congregations of faithful people.”<sup>2</sup>

The subject matter of the church is persons who have separated themselves from the world, that is, are “saints.” The regenerate character of the persons forming the true Church is set over against the condition of the parishes in the Church of England in sharp contrast.

But this company of “saints” is not merely united by the simple spiritual bond which must link all believers according to the necessary affinities of their life in Christ. They are “gathered” into companies for communion and mutual helpfulness. The true church exists in an organized company.

The bond in this organization is not allegiance to any system of church government or group of officers. It is a covenant with God, who is the source of all light and the object of all love, to walk in his ways. We must not fail to notice

<sup>1</sup> Page 132.    <sup>2</sup> Page 388.

the terms of the Scrooby covenant. It does not consider the revelation of God's will as yet perfectly made. Those early Separatists covenanted to walk in all his ways "made known, or to be made known" unto them. They were going to school to God. The windows were open to the light. Their faces were set forward. That splendid covenant stands as an open challenge to every one who charges the Pilgrim Fathers with bigotry and hardness.

And lastly, this single congregation, thus united in covenant, has the whole power which Christ gave his Church, lodged within itself. No man or body of men, no state or assembly, is to do for it what God has equipped it to do for itself. It is to choose its minister and ordain him; it is to receive or expel its members; it is to endow its ordained officers with the power to administer the sacraments.

This is the Church of the Separation standing out in marked contrast with the elaborate ecclesiastical system outlined in the Canons of 1603-04.

We must notice at this point Robinson's position concerning polity, as defining his place among the leaders of the Separation. It turns on the discussion of where the "ruling power of Christ"

is placed. The starting-point of the discussion is Bernard's statement that

"the Papists plant the ruling power of Christ in the Pope; the Protestants, in the bishops; the Puritans, in the presbytery; the Brownists, in the body of the congregation, the multitude called the church."

Robinson's general teaching concerning polity may be grouped to advantage about this statement.

In the first place, he resents any insinuation that the elders do not fully exercise the functions of government in the Separatist congregations. He says,

"We profess the bishops, or elders, to be the only ordinary governors of the church."<sup>1</sup>

He then proposes a medley of polity, wandering in the dark toward what we should now term democracy. There are, he claims, three kinds of polity for the church which are good and lawful:

"monarchical, where supreme authority is in the hands of one; aristocratical, when it is in the hands of some few select persons; and democratical, in the whole body or multitude. And all these three forms have their places in the Church of Christ. In respect of him, the Head, it is a monarchy; in respect of the eldership, an

<sup>1</sup> Page 7.

aristocracy; in respect of the body, a popular state."<sup>1</sup>

This is not a new idea. In the fourth Martin Marprelate tract of 1588-89 the same general thought had been advanced. But Robinson carries it out fully. In the first place, although the

"Lord Jesus is the King of his Church alone, upon whose shoulders the government is, and unto whom all power is given in heaven and earth," he has nevertheless communicated this power to the members of the church, making each member a prophet, to teach; a priest, to offer the spiritual sacrifice of praise and prayer for himself and others; and a king, to guide and govern himself and others in the ways of godliness. Thus the power of Christ is imparted directly to the members of the church. But just as the exigencies of actual government might bring a multitude of kings together to consult concerning common interests and administer their mutual affairs, in which case they would choose and appoint some few to be over them for the purpose of the orderly administration of those affairs, "so in this royal assembly, the Church of Christ, though all be kings," yet some are set over the rest to govern in an office which is a service of ministry.

<sup>1</sup> Page 140.



Thus arises in the church, from the democratic function lodged within it by God the King, the aristocracy of the presbytery.

"The Lord Jesus," says Robinson, "hath given to his church a presbytery, or college of elders or bishops . . . for the teaching and governing of the whole flock according to his will; and these the multitude, jointly and severally, is bound to obey, all and every one of them."<sup>1</sup>

But it is one thing for the officers to govern the church and the people to be bound to obey them; it is quite another thing to say "the church is the officers." The latter statement Robinson repudiates. The power of the officers is given to them "mediately by Christ from the church."

And yet, near as this is to democracy, Robinson is so anxious to defend himself and his church from the charge of "anarchy" and "confusion," that he is unwilling to allow the Separatist polity to be called "democratic." Although he asserts that in the church all have equal power and voice, the officers only guiding them in their action, as is the case of the speaker in the House of Commons, yet he expressly says,

"The external church government under Christ, the only mediator and monarch thereof, is plainly

<sup>1</sup> Page 142.

aristocratical, and to be administered by some certain choice men, although the state, which many unskilfully confound with the government, be after a sort popular and democratical.”<sup>1</sup>

Here appears one of those fine distinctions which we shall find sometimes appearing at critical junctures in Robinson’s writing. The Church, in its ideal relation to its invisible Head, is a monarchy; in the authority which it possesses and exercises, it is a democracy; but its external system of government is an aristocracy, the elders being the chosen agents for the exercise of the ruling power of Christ. This was Robinson’s theory. Before we can classify his position in relation to Barrow and Browne, however, we must see how he organized his church practically in Leyden.

The church comes first; then the officers are chosen; and a company of Christian believers gathered into covenant relations may be called a church even if they have no officers. We have called attention to this point in discussing the matter of the complete organization of the Scrooby church in Amsterdam.

Looking at the New Testament model, Robinson finds that there were five classes of officers

<sup>1</sup> “Just and Necessary Apology,” Works, 3: 42.

appointed for it. These were apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The first three were temporary. The last two are permanent. Pastors and teachers may be assigned to particular congregations only. They may both be called elders or bishops. The pastor is ruling elder; the teacher, teaching elder. Of these the teaching elder is far more important than the ruling elder; even the king himself, as a ruling elder, would be inferior to the teaching elder of a church. There is no such thing as a ministry at large; the minister of a congregation ceases to be a minister if the congregation be dissolved. There is no such thing as an "order" of the ministry. The minister (either pastor or teacher) is one of the brethren and does not cease to be a brother in the church when chosen to his office. He must possess the mental and spiritual qualifications for such an office, be examined, chosen and ordained by the church, and be subject to their censures in case of misconduct or infidelity.

In concluding this study of the grounds of the Separation we must observe to what extent it was to be carried. We have seen already that, after an intense struggle, Robinson reached his decision for the Separation and went to Gainsborough, where he found John Smyth carrying

his doctrine to the bitter end, and insisting upon a complete withdrawal from every act of religious communion, even to the extent of reading the Scriptures and private prayer, between the Separatists and members of the Church of England. It was on this account that Robinson refused to join Smyth and later cast his fortunes with the Scrooby brethren. We should, therefore, expect to find him, in these first controversies, maintaining the same position which he had held against Smyth. We are no little surprised, then, to discover him an advocate of the rigid Separation in his debate with Bernard. Two of the errors which Bernard charged against the Separatists were that they refused to hear any ministers of the Church of England preach, and that they held it to be unlawful to join in prayer with any of them.

Robinson defends the Separatists in this respect. He says,

“Communion is a matter of order or relation; the holiness of a man’s person is not sufficient [warrant] for communion, but withal it must be ranged into the order of a church, wherein both his person and actions must combine.”

Therefore, he concludes,

“we ought to communicate both in prayer, and

in all the other ordinances of God, with all God's children, except they themselves hinder it, or put a bar; which we are persuaded they in the Church of England do, in choosing rather the communion of all the profane rout in the Kingdom under the prelates' tyranny, than the communion of saints, which Christ hath established under his government."<sup>1</sup>

And so, although the ground is not covered by any lengthy argument for the practice, Robinson here commits himself to the rigid Separation.

We turn, therefore, to seek the reason for this change. He gives it himself in the preface of a treatise issued in 1614, in which he returned to his first position. Here he says concerning his argument with Bernard,

"Indeed afterwards [that is, after his election as pastor of the Scrooby church, when he was objected to by members of John Smyth's church on the ground that he was not a rigid Separatist] finding them of other churches, with whom I was most nearly joined [in Amsterdam], otherwise minded for the most part, I did, through my vehement desire of peace, and weakness withal, remit and lose of my former resolution; and did, to speak as the truth is, forget some of my former grounds; and so have passed out upon occasion some arguments against this prac-

<sup>1</sup> Pages 463, 464.

tice [of communion in private prayer with members of the Church of England].”<sup>1</sup>

It was the force of personal influence, therefore, on the part of the Separatist leaders in Amsterdam, supplemented by a temper which was strongly given to all that would make for peace, which brought Robinson to make this change. He was never heartily convinced of the truth of the new position, he tells us; and he made the mistake of yielding for the sake of what seemed the deeper harmony of the Separatist churches. It is a noble confession of error which he makes in the later treatise. We shall have occasion to refer to this again when we study his individual contribution to the Separation in his epoch-making discussion on this very matter of religious communion. At this point we see him sacrificing a conviction in the interests of peace. That policy always fails. We shall see it fail with him.

<sup>1</sup> “Of Religious Communion,” Works, 3: 102.

VI

SETTLEMENT IN LEYDEN





## CHAPTER VI

### SETTLEMENT IN LEYDEN

THE journey from Amsterdam to Leyden, in the glorious spring of the year, was neither long nor arduous. The indication of the petition to the city authorities is that members of the church had already settled in Leyden, where they had made the arrangements for the removal, and where they would be ready to welcome their comrades upon their arrival. This was the natural plan, for Robinson in every instance remained behind until the last of his congregation, the feeblest and oldest, were ready to move.

Dr. Griffis, in his book, "The Pilgrims in Their Three Homes," has given a pen picture of the journey between the cities:

"We can imagine the little flotilla freighted with household goods and crowded with plainly and soberly dressed English people, conspicuous among whom was the dignified John Robinson. In clerical garb, and wearing a cap which looked exactly like a watermelon cut in half, with perhaps a little band of lace around the bottom,

and wearing also a ruff around his neck, he would be easily recognized.”<sup>1</sup>

On reaching the new home, Robinson was face to face with the problem of self-support for his people. They were farmers, and therefore could not quickly set themselves to profitable employment. At the same time they had probably increased their difficulties by removing to a city which furnished less variety in occupation than Amsterdam had afforded. They must keep together as a company, which would have been impossible if they had gone outside the city to engage in agriculture. Thus the conditions of their life were hard. But there is little complaint about this in any of Robinson's writings. The church seems to have been united to a wonderful degree in its purpose, and practical wisdom prevailed in its counsels. As Bradford says, they were men “valewing peace and their spirituall comforte above any other riches whatsoever.”<sup>2</sup> And their thrift and happiness enabled them finally to establish themselves in Leyden in circumstances of tolerable comfort.

The trades to which the people set their hands were those connected with the manufacture of

<sup>1</sup> “The Pilgrims in Their Three Homes,” p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> “Of Plimoth Plantation,” pp. 23, 24.

all kinds of woven goods. The preparation of the raw material and the manufacture of the goods were carried on in small factories, or more often in the homes of the toilers. The industrial revolution and the growth of the factory had not then taken place. It was in these small industries connected with the manufacture of woollen goods that the people gained their livelihood.

We cannot determine accurately the part of the city in which the Scrooby brethren settled, but it probably was in the newer and, therefore, cheaper sections, which began to be opened up when the Great Truce between the Dutch patriots and their enemies gave assurance that for at least twelve years there would be a cessation in the horrors of war through which Leyden had passed.

The peace of the city was evident not only industrially, but religiously. There was a Presbyterian church in the city, whose membership was made up of English and Scotch residents. This was established about the time that the Separatists reached Leyden, and its minister until 1616 was Rev. Robert Durie. They were granted a place of worship by the authorities.

It was generally supposed at one time that the Scrooby brethren were also given a place

of worship in Leyden by the magistrates. This rested upon references in Winslow's "Brief Narration" and Prince's "Annals" (1736). The matter was sifted thoroughly by George Sumner,<sup>1</sup> and the unreliability of the witnesses to any such thing has been established. The influence of King James was very strong in Holland. Reference will be made later to the manner in which the Dutch authorities sought to carry out the wishes of the English king in the matter of the arrest of William Brewster. The records of the city during the years of Robinson's residence there are complete, and there is no notice of any petition for a place of worship from the church, although the petition to immigrate is given. Indeed, there seems to have been quite another plan in Robinson's mind. This was to obtain a place large enough to serve both as his own residence and as a meeting place for his church. This plan he was evidently unable to carry out at once on his arrival in Leyden. We have no information as to where he lived before he entered the large house, the purchase of which is recorded in the following deed:

We, PIETER ARENTSZOON DEYMAN and

<sup>1</sup> See Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., Series 3, Vol. 9, pp. 42-74, "Memoirs of the Pilgrims in Leyden," and Proceedings, Vol. 18, p. 210.



SITE OF JOHN ROBINSON'S HOUSE, LEYDEN  
(Occupied by house with arched door.)



AMELIS VAN HOGEVEEN, Schepens [magistrates] in Leyden, make known that before us came JOHAN DE LALAING, declaring, for himself and his heirs, that he had sold, and by these presents does sell, to JAN ROBINSZON, Minister of GOD'S Word of the English Congregation in this city, WILLEM JEPSON, HENRY WOOD and RAYNULPH TICKENS, who has married JANE WHITE — jointly and each for himself an equal fourth part — a house and ground, with a garden situated on the west side thereof, standing and being in this city on the south side of the Pieter's Kerekhoff near the Belfry; formerly called the Groene Port."

This is the first paragraph of the deed,<sup>1</sup> which was witnessed and sealed on May 5, 1611. There are two items especially to be noticed here. Robinson's name is associated with those of three members of his congregation in the enterprise. He seems to be the leader in the undertaking, as his name comes first. The entire project was undoubtedly carried through in the interests of the whole congregation, and formed one item in that large scheme for the permanence and welfare of his people which Robinson always kept in view. The other noteworthy incident is the mention of the fact in connection with the name

<sup>1</sup> The whole is printed in Arber, "Story of the Pilgrim Fathers," pp. 156-157.

of Thickenes or Tickens that he had married Jane White. What reason can there be for this? The names of other wives are not given in the deed. Thickenes was Robinson's brother-in-law, having married Jane White, sister to Mrs. Robinson, whose maiden name was Bridget White. The conjecture has been made that Jane White's name is mentioned in this deed for the reason that her husband's share of the purchase money was understood to come from her. If this is so it would imply that Robinson's wife may also have been the possessor of money in her own right. The whole matter, however, is merely speculation. The price of this property was eight thousand guilders, of which two thousand were paid down and the promise given that five hundred should be paid yearly, beginning in May, 1612, until the entire balance should be liquidated. This total sum was equal to about sixteen thousand dollars of our present American money. The first payment, therefore, was about four thousand dollars, of which John Robinson's equal share was one thousand dollars. The location of this property was most advantageous. It was over against the great Peter's Church, near the military headquarters of the city, and very close to the University. At the rear was the chapel of



the Veiled Nuns' Cloister, where the congregation of Rev. Robert Durie met for worship, and on the upper floor of which the library of the great University was then placed. Also the land in the rear of the house was well adapted to the arrangement of a "hof," where small houses are built about a central court and the little community composed of their inhabitants is screened from public view. With Robinson, in the enterprise, was associated a carpenter, William Jepson, and the erection of twenty-one small houses about the court was begun. Doubtless in these lived Separatist families which were in greater need of help than others. But, in spite of this paternal arrangement, we must not think of Robinson as here setting up any of those communistic schemes which men like the Anabaptists, and others who laid great emphasis upon the New Testament model of the true Church, have erected from time to time with such disaster to their cause. Robinson's writings are free from any hint at such a theory. The Separatists were a brotherhood, bound by their covenant and by the hardness of their experience, to help one another. But their pastor was a far-sighted and well-balanced man, who was not led into excess of literalness in application, however he

valued the New Testament model. In fact, his interpretation of the New Testament model was the true one. For "the so-called communism of primitive Christianity was simply the glad, free, domestic relationship of generous aid and service, such as any modern Christian congregation might legitimately strive to imitate. It did not abolish distinctions of rich and poor, still less did it enter the sphere of productive industry. Its economics were those of a loving family."<sup>1</sup> This was the principle which Robinson sought to embody in his practical enterprise in Bell Alley. It was, like his controversies, judicious, clear-sighted and fraternal. The pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers was a wise organizer.

And now, that we may get a clear picture of the Leyden church in its permanent home in Bell Alley, let us listen to the quaint, sincere description of one of its strongest and most devoted members, which is here reproduced in its original spelling:

Being thus settled (after many difficulties) they continued many years in a comfortable condition, injoying much sweete & delightfull societie & spirituall comforte togeather in ye wayes of God, under ye able ministrie, and prudente governmente of Mr. John Robinson, &

<sup>1</sup> F. G. Peabody, "Jesus Christ and the Social Question," 1900, p. 24.

Mr. William Brewster, who was an assistante unto him in ye place of an Elder, unto which he was now called & chosen by the church. So as they grew in knowledge & other gifts & graces of ye spirite of God, & lived together in peace & love, and holines; and many came unto them from diverse parts of England, so as they grew a great congregation. And if at any time any differences arose, or offences broak out (as it cannot be, but some time ther will, even amongst ye best of men) they were ever so mete with, and nipt in ye head betims, or otherwise so well composed, as still love, peace, and communion was continued; or els ye church purged of those that were incurable & incorrigible, when, after much patience used, no other means would serve, which seldom came to pass. Yea such was ye mutuall love, & reciprocall respecte that this worthy man had to his flocke, and his flocke to him, that it might be said of them as it once was of yt famouse Emperour Marcus Aurelius, and ye people of Rome, that it was hard to judge wheather he delighted more in haveing shuch a people, or they in haveing such a pastor. His love was greate towards them, and his care was all ways bente for their best good, both for soule and body; for besides his singuler abilities in devine things (wherein he excelled), he was also very able to give directions in civill affaires, and to foresee dangers & inconveniences: by w<sup>ch</sup> means he was very helpfull to their outward estats

& so was every way as a commone father unto them. And none did more offend him then those that were close and cleaving to themselves, and retired from y<sup>e</sup> commōe good; as also such as would be stiffe & rigned in matters of outward order, and invey against y<sup>e</sup> evils of others, and yet be remisse in them selves, and not so carefull to express a vertuous conversation. They in like maner had ever a reverente regard unto him, & had him in precious estimation, as his worth & wisdom did deserve; and though they esteemed him highly whilst he lived & laboured amongst them, yet much more after his death, when they came to feelee y<sup>e</sup> wante of his help, and saw (by woefull experience) what a treasure they had lost, to y<sup>e</sup> greefe of their harts, and wounding of their sowls; yea such a loss as they saw could not be repaired; for it was as hard for them to find such another leader and feeder in all respects, as for y<sup>e</sup> Taborits to find another Ziska. And though they did not call themselves orphans, as the other did, after his death, yet they had cause as much to lamente, in another regard, their present condition, and after usage. But to returne; I know not but it may be spoken of y<sup>e</sup> honour of God, & without prejudice to any, that such was y<sup>e</sup> true pietie, y<sup>e</sup> humble zeale, & fervent love, of this people (whilst they thus lived together) towards God and his waies, and y<sup>e</sup> single hartednes & sinceir affection one towards another, that they came as near y<sup>e</sup> primitive patterne of y<sup>e</sup> first churches, as any other

church of these later times have done, according to their ranke & qualitie.<sup>1</sup>

After the house in Bell Alley had been purchased, Robinson lived there with his growing family of children. We have no satisfactory data from which we can determine either the date of Robinson's marriage or the ages of his children. Mrs. Robinson's maiden name was Bridget White. Her sister Jane married Randall Thickers. Dr. Henry M. Dexter conjectures<sup>2</sup> that another sister of Mrs. Robinson, Frances White, married Francis Jessop in Worksop, not far from Gainsborough, January 24, 1605. There is nothing certain about this, however.

We are a little clearer concerning the names and number of Robinson's children. We have a tax list of the year 1622 which shows us that Robinson's family was the only one occupying the house itself. The list is as follows:

John Robinson, preacher; Bridget Robinson, his wife; their children, John, Bridget, Isaac, Mercy, Fear, James; Mary Hardy, a servant maid."<sup>3</sup>

The existence of the university must have

<sup>1</sup> Bradford, "Of Plimoth Plantation," pp. 24-26.

<sup>2</sup> "Congregationalism as Seen," p. 378.

<sup>3</sup> Griffis, "Pilgrims in their Three Homes," p. 240.

been one of the strong attractions of Leyden for Robinson. And yet, he was not admitted to its privileges for some time after his arrival in the city. This is in marked contrast with the case of Rev. Robert Durie, the minister of the Presbyterian church that worshiped in the chapel close by the Robinson house. On April 27, 1610, Durie was matriculated, and is described as Minister of the English Church. But it was not until September 5, 1615, that Robinson was admitted as a student of theology, and in the records of the university he is described simply as "an Englishman." This serves to show still more plainly that the Separatists never received official recognition as a church by the Dutch. The fear of giving "offence to ye state of England" was sufficient to prevent any public favor. Membership in the university brought with it privileges of a literary and social nature which would be of value to Robinson. It also freed him from the duty of acting on patrol in time of war, and gave him the privilege of brewing a certain amount of beer without paying a tax. But the greatest privilege was the freedom which it gave him from liability to arrest by any except the officers of the university. This never served him any in practical life, but it might have done so had any

of his books incurred the severe displeasure of King James.

Meantime the church affairs were prospering and peace prevailed in the councils of the congregation. And the church came very soon to represent a definite phase of thought and practice which was the result of its pastor's leadership. It still bore close relationships with Amsterdam; it worked out and pursued a policy of its own. In the succeeding chapters we shall study these elements in the Leyden life in order to determine John Robinson's real place in the history of the Congregational churches.





VII

THE CHAMPION OF CALVINISM



## CHAPTER VII

### THE CHAMPION OF CALVINISM

WE have followed the story of Robinson's life through the storm and stress of his decision for the Separation; we have seen him rise to a position of leadership in the suffering congregation gathered about Scrooby; we have witnessed his foresight in Amsterdam after he had become the head of the exiled church; we have discovered the signs of his strong personal command of the situation of the growing church in Leyden. Back of all this expanding influence lay a theological conviction, brought into definite system by formal statement. Robinson defined and defended a system of church polity. He was also the champion of a system of theology. In this chapter it is not necessary to enter into any detailed examination of Robinson's theological positions. The main question that interests us is, rather, Do the purely theological teachings of Robinson display any signs of change?

Robinson stood ready to accept the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, with that

Calvinistic interpretation which they will bear and which he gave to them. There are sources, however, from which we can draw much more fully in arriving at an adequate conception of his whole system of theology.

The first of these is his treatise, "Of Religious Communion," the larger part of which is concerned with an answer to two books by Thomas Helwisse. One of these books, "A Declaration of the Faith of the English People remaining at Amsterdam," sets forth the creed of the Baptist church formed by John Smyth there, of which Helwisse was chosen pastor after Smyth's death in 1609. This "Declaration" was published in 1611. Robinson's reply appeared in 1614.

The second source is a reply to a book by John Murton, "A Description of what God hath predestinated concerning Man," published in 1620. Murton here attacks the Calvinistic theology of the creed sanctioned by the Synod of Dort, and specifically attempts to overthrow Robinson's position in relation to baptism.

Robinson answered this with "A Defence of the Doctrine propounded by the Synod at Dort," published in 1624. We must remember that the fact of Robinson's championship of the truth embodied in this particular creed is not nec-

essarily due to his belief that this was the one perfect and unalterable expression of the last word to be said upon Christian doctrine. This is a controversy and he is defending the specific cause attacked by his opponents, which, in this case, was the creed of the Synod of Dort.

Between these two sources there lies a period of ten years, during the early part of which Robinson passed through certain radical changes of opinion regarding the practice of the Christian life. In theology, however, there is no radical change. The main positions urged against Helwisse in 1614 are those maintained against Murton in 1624.

Let us look at these very briefly. It is a struggle between the ideas of God's absolute sovereignty and the complete freedom of the will, the conflict between high Calvinism and protesting Arminianism. It is not a struggle involving mere opinions in speculative theology; it is a war between religious dogmas which are inseparably linked with political policies and the destiny of the state. It is, therefore, necessary to bear in mind the political as well as the religious situation.

Beginning at the central point of the theology, the sovereignty of God, let us follow Robinson

in a somewhat hasty fashion, in order that we may see not only what he believed, but the reasons upon which he seemed to himself warranted in resting his faith.

The matter of God's decrees touching sin comes up for immediate treatment.

"God hath not only foreseen and determined the issues and events of His works, but hath also decreed and purposed the works themselves before the foundation of the world." <sup>1</sup>

"The condemnation of wicked men by God, for sin by their free will to be wrought, was purposed by God before the world." <sup>2</sup>

"God's full foreknowledge of the course of human history makes necessary his full determination of all that which he foresees." <sup>3</sup>

And yet God is not the author of human sin,

"neither indeed is it sensible to say that God determined what the will of others would do."

God does not command or work evil; he is

"the Supreme Governor of the whole world, and of all persons and actions therein, how sinful soever, using and ordering the covetousness of Judas, the envy of the priests, and injustice of Pilate, to the event of Christ's death, [actions] in regard of them most wicked, but of God, most gracious, and of us, most profitable."

<sup>1</sup> "Of Religious Communion," 3: 238.

<sup>2</sup> "Defence," 1: 279, 281.

<sup>3</sup> "Of Religious Communion," 3: 239.

The first point to be observed here is that Robinson squarely faces the two facts of God's sovereignty and man's freedom. He asserts both and proposes the dilemma that results.

"If any demand how this can be, that God, who forbiddeth and hateth sin, yet should so order persons and things by his providence, and so from eternity purpose to order them, as that the same cannot be, I answer, by free acknowledgment that the manner of God's working herein is to me and to all men inconceivable."<sup>1</sup>

And yet Robinson realized that some effort must be made by the reason to answer the question. This effort he made in advancing two subtle "distinctions" to clear up the matter. The first is a difference between necessity and compulsion. Every human action is very complex; there are many forces at work whenever a choice is made. Therefore the choice may be viewed from many sides. If a man were struck so forcibly by a blow from outside that he absolutely could not avoid falling, it would be a case of compulsion. God never compels a soul in this way. But when we take such an act as the meeting of Ahab and Elijah (I Kings 21:18), we see how an action may be viewed in many ways.

<sup>1</sup> "Defence." 1: 274, 275.

To Ahab this was a chance meeting; to Elijah it was the obedience of a divine command; it was an illustration of necessity but not of compulsion. Since God's will was carried out in it, it was a necessary action.<sup>1</sup> The second subtle distinction lies in the fact that God may be "the author of the action or fact, but not of the sin of the fact." This becomes clearer when we note Robinson's conception of sin, which is not "a thought, word, or deed contrary to the will of God," (as his antagonists held), but sin consists "in the contrariety which the same deed or motion hath in it to the law of God." Sin is "only the absence and want of that conformity and agreeableness, which ought to be in the thought, word or work of the reasonable creature to the law of God." Every action, therefore, is to be regarded intrinsically as an action, and then in regard to its moral quality. If a murder were committed, the deed must be considered both as a specific act and then as to its moral content; as, for example, it is clear that the execution of a condemned criminal by the magistrate and the killing of Amasa by Joab is, in the former case, a good action, and in the second case a bad action. So, God is the author

<sup>1</sup> "Defence," 1: 291.



of the intrinsic action, but not of the moral quality, or the perversion of the right use of the action in which the sin consists.

We have brought forward this specific instance of Robinson's argument, simply that the general tenor of a considerable body of his reasoning may be seen. His weakest point is always in his attempt to justify himself in places where he recognizes the difficulties and contradictions of his position. He is a thoroughgoing Calvinist, and the fact that he could remain even partially satisfied with his "subtle distinctions" is striking. To Robinson's opponents this was "merely a fabulous riddle" and "marvellous sophistication." But he was humble and earnest in his effort to handle "those high mysteries" of the divine sovereignty and human freedom. His arguments were not new, neither were they convincing, and the real man is far less revealed in them than in his strong assertion of both terms of the controversy, standing with a humble heart acknowledging that the mystery was inexplicable.

On only one other point is it necessary to dwell at any length. This is the matter of the Atonement. Man is in a state of sin which is the result of the transgression of Adam. This act came about by Adam's free choice, God having decreed,

not the choice itself, but the conditions under which the choice was made. The sin followed, but not "as an effect upon a cause working it — God forbid! — but as a consequent upon an antecedent; or as an event necessarily following upon a most holy, wise, and powerful providence, so ordering and disposing, that the same should so come to pass infallibly, though performed by Adam's free, and freely-working will."<sup>1</sup> All Adam's posterity are born with a sinful disposition for which they are responsible, and to change which a gift of supernatural grace is necessary. Atonement for this sin is made possible by the grace of God in the work of Christ. But the redemption is not universal. Christ's death is sufficient for all, since it was the death of him who was God; but it has not been made efficient for all. Christ died "effectually" for "them only that are saved." Christ did not die for all; but all for whom Christ died shall be saved.<sup>2</sup>

This is carrying the doctrine of election and a limited atonement to the extreme. Robinson does not hesitate to do this. He proposes no theory of the atonement; but he plainly limits it to the elect.

<sup>1</sup> "Defence," 1: 274.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 333.

We will not take up more points in this survey of Robinson's theological writing. The champion of Calvinism is radical and thoroughgoing, and there is no sign of mellowing in the austerity of his convictions during these ten years from 1614 to 1624. The work which he did as a writer for the cause was supplemented by what he did in public debate. This brings up the matter of the so-called "Dispute with Episcopius." The historical situation was briefly as follows:

The feature that distinguishes the German from the Dutch churches is the fact that the former are Lutheran and the latter Calvinistic. The Calvinistic theology, therefore, obtained supremacy in the Dutch church and was taught in the schools. The first radical modification of strict Calvinistic theology by an official teacher was by James Arminius, professor of theology at Leyden, who died in October, 1609. Between himself and his colleague Gomarus the controversy concerning predestination was waged bitterly so long as Arminius lived. The closing months of this personal contention marked the settlement of John Robinson and his company in Leyden.<sup>1</sup> After an interim of two years, Arminius was

<sup>1</sup> Griffis, "The Pilgrims in Their Three Homes," p. 140, says that Arminius "died October 19, 1609, while the Pilgrims were in Amsterdam." The Scrooby brethren were settled in Leyden before that date.

succeeded in the chair of theology in Leyden by Episcopius, who held that chair from 1611 until after the decree of the Synod of Dort banished him in 1618. During this time controversy in the University grew more intense. Robinson's part in it is thus reported by Bradford:

“In these times allso were ye great troubles raised by ye Arminians, who, as they greatly molested ye whole state, so this citie in particuler, in which was ye cheefe universitie; so as ther were dayly & hote disputs in ye schooles ther aboute; and as ye studients & other lerned were devided in their oppinions hearin, so were ye 2. proffessors or devinitie readers them selves; the one daly teaching for it, ye other against it. Which grew to that pass, that few of the discipels of ye one would hear ye other teach. But Mr. Robinson, though he taught thrise a weeke him selfe, & write sundrie books, besids his manyfould pains otherwise, yet he went constantly to hear ther readings, and heard ye one as well as ye other; by which means he was so well grounded in ye controversie, and saw ye force of all their arguments, and knew ye shifts of ye adversarie, and being him selfe very able, none was fitter to buckle with them then him selfe, as appered by sundrie disputs; so as he begane to be terrible to ye Arminians; which made Episcopius (ye Arminian professor) to put forth his best stringth, and set forth sundrie Theses, which by publick dispute he would defend against all men.

Now Poliander y<sup>e</sup> other proffessor, and y<sup>e</sup> cheefe preachers of y<sup>e</sup> citie, desired Mr. Robinson to dispute against him; but he was loath, being a stranger; yet the other did importune him, and tould him y<sup>t</sup> such was y<sup>e</sup> abilitie and nimblnes of y<sup>e</sup> adversarie, that y<sup>e</sup> truth would suffer if he did not help them. So as he condescended, & prepared him selfe against the time; and when y<sup>e</sup> day came, the Lord did so help him to defend y<sup>e</sup> truth & foyle this adversarie, as he put him to an apparent nonplus, in this great & publike audience. And y<sup>e</sup> like he did a 2. or 3. time, upon such like occasions. The which as it caused many to praise God y<sup>t</sup> the trueth had so famous victory, so it procured him much honour & respecte from those lerned men & others which loved y<sup>e</sup> trueth.''<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt about the common acceptance of this report concerning the large significance of John Robinson's debate with his Arminian antagonist. Governor Winslow inserts the same general statement into his "*Hypocrisie Unmasked*." The details are not all clear; but we have no reason for distrusting Bradford's statement.

Rev. Alexander Gordon, who contributes the article on Robinson to "*The Dictionary of National Biography*,"<sup>2</sup> thinks that there may be some basis in fact behind these reports, but main-

<sup>1</sup> "Of Plimoth Plantation," pp. 27, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. xlix, pp. 18 ff.

tains that it is not probable either that the dispute was held in the University or that it was undertaken at the request of Polyander and the city ministers. In proof he cites the silence of the records of the university on the matter, and the fact that, at this time, the dominant party in Leyden was the Arminian.

We are not warranted in the least, even if we accept Bradford very literally, in imagining that this disputation was an academic function of sufficient moment to cause it to be recorded in the list of events in the university. The silence of the records has no special bearing in the case. We know that Robinson was an attendant at lectures in the university, and, at a time of intense excitement over a question of theology and politics, such as the Arminian question then was, it is wholly within the bounds of reason to suppose that Robinson went to the public discussions which would be held in the university as a champion of the Calvinistic side.

There is another point which has not been considered fully in regard to its bearing upon the probable share of Robinson in the discussion of the burning question in the university. Why did Robinson write and publish the "Defence of the Doctrine propounded by the Synod at Dort"?

There was no special demand for the composition or publication of such a work from his own congregation. Robinson's writing in defence of the Separation as a whole, and his treatment of developing phases of practice in his own church were made necessary by the specific needs of his own congregation. Such a work as the "Defence," however, was not carried through merely in the interests of his own people. Robinson was abundantly able to instruct them in doctrine by his sermons and lectures, which undoubtedly were composed very largely of dogmatic material. The "Defence" presupposes a far wider circle of readers than Separatists in Leyden and Amsterdam. It is most reasonable to believe that he was encouraged in its preparation and publication by the leaders of the contest with Arminian teachings, who, Bradford says, invited Robinson to enter the lists of oral debate.

Hence, Robinson bore a part, dignified and conspicuous, in the oral and written defence of Calvinistic doctrine in Leyden. It was as earnest as his defence of the Separation, although it exhibits far less flexibility than we find in his treatment of the theory and practice of a free church.





VIII

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY CONCERN-  
ING FELLOWSHIP



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE GREAT CONTROVERSY CONCERNING FELLOWSHIP

FROM a survey of the stern, inflexible, dogmatic teaching of Robinson it is a pleasure to turn to a study of the gracious movement of his theory and practice in relation to Christian fellowship. The story is interesting from the outset. It covers the whole period of his Leyden pastorate. For the sake of unity it will be brought together entire in this chapter. It is in this great controversy that Robinson made a unique contribution to the history of the Congregational churches.

Let us review for a moment the position which he had taken as the result of personal pressure brought to bear upon him in Amsterdam. He went to the limits of complete separation from the members of the Church of England. He did not deny the reality of their faith nor the genuineness of certain moral and spiritual qualities in them. But he believed that the ecclesiastical system of the English Christians as established by law was utterly false and sinful, and that true faith

and excellent spiritual character could not possibly exist in the Anglican system in such a way that he could enjoy communion with its members. It appeared to him like the case of the meats offered in sacrifices in heathen temples. The early Christians were forbidden to eat them, not because the whole subject of meat for food was involved, but because in this case the meat had been so essentially connected with something evil that it was thereby contaminated and its use forbidden. Therefore, a complete separation from the members of the Church of England was necessary, because its corruption was essential. Thus he carried the Separation to its bitter end. He had reached this position in Amsterdam and had defined it in 1610. It was uncharitable ground; but there can be no question concerning Robinson's clear conception of all that it involved, and no doubt about his sincerity in maintaining the rigid Separation.

The first sign of a change in Robinson's position appears from letters which passed between himself and Rev. William Ames, enough of which have been preserved to enable us to see the positions taken by the correspondents.

William Ames was a man of Robinson's own age; had been, as a pupil in Cambridge, very deeply

influenced by William Perkins; had refused to wear the surplice and, therefore, had suffered suspension; and had come to be an able representative of the conforming Puritans. He was a more learned and a much stronger antagonist than Bernard. He was often in Holland, and is said to have been sent to Leyden at the expense of certain English merchants for the purpose of engaging in controversy with Robinson. He was an ardent champion of Calvinism, and watched the proceedings of the Synod of Dort in the interests of this doctrine.

There seems to be little doubt that Ames was engaged in personal controversy with Robinson in Leyden in reference to the Separation. And this was probably the occasion of the exchange of letters, to which we will now turn.

They are preserved in a small volume which contains a virulent attack upon the Ancient London Church, published in 1612, under the title "The Prophane Schisme of the Brownists or Separatists." Christopher Lawne and three others are named as the authors, but Robinson asserts that the book is the work of others than these. In this volume, William Ames allowed certain letters that had been exchanged between himself and Robinson to be published without the latter's

consent or least suspicion that they were to be made public in this way.

Robinson's first letter is lost. Ames replied to it, evidently from the Hague, in 1611. He urged Robinson to consider if communion were not possible entirely outside a church order. The fact that men have communion with Christ is the ground of their communion with one another. Prayer is indulged in before a covenant is entered; but, even Robinson would hold, the church exists by virtue of its covenant; therefore communion in prayer is possible out of any church organization.

To this letter Robinson made answer from Leyden, maintaining stiffly that religious communion does not rest upon the discovery of inward fellowship with Christ, but that it is conditioned upon the orderly establishment of church relations. Therefore, it is unlawful for Separatists to hear Anglican ministers preach; or to join with them in prayer; or even to engage in private prayer with members of the Church of England.

In these letters to Ames, then, we find Robinson holding the same position which he maintained against Bernard in his "Justification of Separation."

But in 1614 there appeared by far the most

significant of all Robinson's books, "Of Religious Communion, Private and Public." The title itself hints at some change of view. His words in the preface and at the very beginning of the treatise show us what this change is. Robinson has realized the force of the difference between "public" and "private" communion. He says that he never intended to call in question the faithfulness and goodness of the many in the parishes of England who were thereby worthy of communion with Christian brethren. But the point which he feared was that the true order of the church would be violated if there should be any communion between those who were gathered in the one true church order (that is, the church of the Separatists) and the Church of England. The change in Robinson's opinion was due to the discovery of

"a distinction of religious actions into personal and church actions, which, if either Mr. A[mes] had observed unto me, or I myself then conceived of, would have cleared the question to my conscience, and with which I did wholly satisfy myself in this matter, when God gave me once to observe it. My judgment therein and the reasons of it I have set down in the first part of the book, [*Of Religious Communion*] unto which I bind no

man further to assent than he sees ground from the Scriptures."<sup>1</sup>

The passage of Scripture from which more light broke to Robinson on this fundamental matter of his religious practice was Col. 2:5,

"For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith."

It is an interesting commentary upon Robinson's value of the Scripture even in its most detailed statements, and the sympathetic manner in which he interpreted it, that this passage, often read so carelessly as one of the less important utterances of a letter of Paul, should decide Robinson's opinions so radically. He discovers here that Paul reduces the reasons of his rejoicing to two, the "faith" and the "order" of the members of the church in Colossæ. Of these, faith is the more important, in that it makes men capable of the church order in which they stand united. From these two fountain heads flow two sorts of religious actions, which may be termed "personal" and "church" actions. Personal actions are those which are prompted and sanctioned by personal faith. They are private prayer, thanksgiving, singing of psalms, profession of faith, confession

<sup>1</sup> "Of Religious Communion," 3: 102.



of sins, reading and explaining the Scriptures, or hearing this done in a family or elsewhere, without the use of any church or ministry for this purpose being deemed necessary. On the other hand, church actions consist in the reception or excommunication of members, electing and deposing of officers, and all employment of a public ministry or communion under the sanction of the church order.

For the first set of actions personal faith only is necessary on the part of those who perform them. Personal faith is also necessary for the right performance of the second set of actions, but, in addition to faith, there must also be a true church order, in and by which these functions are to be realized.

The practical result of this distinction in Scripture is a new proposition, namely,

“that we who profess a Separation from the English national, provincial, diocesan and parochial church and churches, in the whole formal state and order thereof, may, notwithstanding, lawfully communicate in private prayer, and other the like holy exercises (not performed in their church communion, nor by their church power and ministry) with the godly amongst them, though remaining of infirmity members of the same church or churches, except some other ex-

traordinary bar come in the way between them and us."<sup>1</sup>

This new proposition Robinson defends at length, admitting its inconsistency with what he had as strenuously maintained in his former writings. But he claims that the new position is really only a return to that which he had occupied at the time of his original decision for the Separation, and that the same difference between faith and order had really been made also by Barrow, Johnson and Ainsworth.

The argument, however, we will not follow in detail. There are two points of value for us as we seek to set forth Robinson's development and character. The first is the manner in which he reached the new position. Such an exegetical conclusion from a rather insignificant passage in the New Testament seems to us quite unwarrantable. No canons of historical-critical interpretation could give us such a result. But to John Robinson the method was perfectly valid and the conclusion perfectly clear. To us it seems that the elaborate result reached had been rather read into the passage by Robinson's own kindly mind craving Scriptural sanction for a catholic view of Christian fellowship. And such may be

<sup>1</sup> "Of Religious Communion," 3: 105.

the case. If it is, the process was unconscious. John Robinson's heart may have craved what he found; he may have hit upon the wealth of meaning which he discovered in Paul's words very largely because of that craving. But to him it was a true breaking forth of light from the Word of God for the guidance of his way. He sought to bind no one to his opinion further than the warrant of the Word seemed to be sufficient. There is no better index to the whole spirit of Robinson's life than we find in this change of opinion concerning communion and the reasons which he himself gives for it. We shall need to recall it when we consider later the use of the phrase "more light," which is so often and so justly used to describe his character.

The effect of this change in position is very marked in the controversies of the time. The followers of Henry Ainsworth in Amsterdam still maintained the rigid Separation. Against them Rev. John Paget, who, we recollect, was the pastor of the Scotch Presbyterian church there, issued "An Arrow against the Separation of the Brownists" in 1618. The publication of Paget's book was occasioned by the refusal of Ainsworth's people to have fellowship with Paget's church members. Robinson's position taken in "Of Religious

Communion" was naturally an argument of prime value to Paget. He writes against Ainsworth,

"You send me unto such a book of Mr. Robinson as himself doth begin to revoke publicly as being unsound in divers things [i. e. the "Justification of Separation," 1610] whereas I refer you unto a later book of his [i. e. "Of Religious Communion"], made with riper deliberation and in no part that I hear of publicly revoked. His . . . *Justification of Separation* is sick of King Jehoram's incurable disease . . . ; unto this rotten book you refer me, and yet blame me that refer you unto that which is more sound." <sup>1</sup>

The same plan of argument is pursued through his book by Paget. And it must have been a difficult point for Ainsworth to meet. His church was deeply stirred over the question, and the people publicly and earnestly urged Ainsworth to defend his position for the rigid Separation against Robinson.<sup>2</sup> Paget also gives us a glimpse of the practice of Robinson's church as early as 1618. He says,

"Mr. Robinson and his people do now (as divers of themselves confess) receive the members of the Church of England unto their congregation, and this without any renunciation of the Church

<sup>1</sup> Paget, "An Arrow," p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

of England, without any repentance for their idolatries, committed in the Church of England. How can you [Ainsworth] hold them to be a true church, and communion with them lawful, seeing that, by your reasoning, they are tied in the cords of their sin as well as we?"<sup>1</sup>

Paget undoubtedly means nothing more than what Robinson would call "private communion" by his statement, "receive the members of the Church of England into their congregation." For Robinson's opinion concerning the matter of distinctively church fellowship had not changed in 1615, when he wrote in reply to William Ames, "A Manumission to a Manuduction, or Answer to a Letter inferring Publique Communion in the Parrish Assemblies upon Private with Godly Persons there."<sup>2</sup> (1615.) Ames sought earnestly to take advantage of the partial victory which he had won in Robinson's book, "Of Religious Communion," and to overcome Robinson's arguments for the necessity of separation in all religious actions involving the use of the Anglican church and ministry. The argument in the "Manumission" is perfectly clear. Robinson held the positions maintained in 1614 in "Of Religious

<sup>1</sup> Paget, "An Arrow," p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> Reprinted in "Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll.," 1: 165-194. Copy in Congressional Library, Boston, Mass.

Communion." Ames published a second "Manuduction" to Robinson in 1615. The influence of this we are not able to determine.

The next available source from which light is to be had on Robinson's teachings and practice regarding fellowship consists of two letters dated in the year 1624, written by him, one to a church in London and another to the church in Amsterdam. The former is the more important. Both were printed as an appendix to Robinson's book, "The Lawfulness of Hearing,"<sup>1</sup> which will be taken up next.

A Separatist church in London had found itself confronted with a practical problem. It was this: A young woman, a member of the church, had been discovered attending the services of the Church of England, especially for the purpose of hearing the Scriptures read and explained. For this the church had disciplined her. She had promised, however, to discontinue the practice for which she was censured, and, on the strength of this promise, she had been restored to fellowship. The London church was not quite clear concerning the decision that they had reached, and sent to the Leyden church for their opinion on the action that had been taken. The decision of the

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 379-393.

Leyden church was read in public there and then sent, by the unanimous consent of the church, to the brethren in London. The reply was explicit concerning the wisdom of retaining the young woman in fellowship:

“We judge, that therein ye did well, yea, though she had continued her practice upon occasion, and without neglect of the church whereof she was a member, how much more leaving it as she did.”<sup>1</sup>

The reply from Leyden, therefore, went beyond the mere terms of the inquiry. The church was ready to approve the permanent retention in fellowship of a member who attended the services of the Church of England, so long as that fact did not interfere with the performance of the member's full duty to his own congregation. This was a long step in advance of the teaching of Robinson in 1614 and 1615.

The London church also made an inquiry concerning the manner in which the members of Henry Jacob's church were to be regarded. This congregation was carrying out the Leyden practice in relation to other churches, and it was causing scandal. They were judged to be “idolaters” in going to the public worship of the Anglican church. The Leyden brethren's counsel was

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 382.

sought as to whether Jacob's church was a true church or not, so long as it maintained this practice. They answered that this was not idolatry in any true sense of the term; Henry Jacob's church was a true church. This judgment was further attested by the fact that two persons, Mr. and Mrs. Staesmore, were received into the Leyden congregation from Henry Jacob's church on the basis of their covenant made in that church, and, later, were again received at Amsterdam. Thus the character of Jacob's church in England was satisfactory to the brethren in Leyden and Amsterdam. At the same time it was known that members of Jacob's church went to the services of the Church of England.

This is clear enough witness concerning Robinson's convictions in the year 1624. These decisions of practical questions came just before Robinson's death. They were simply the practical application of a new principle which he was working out, and which he put into a treatise that we now have under the following title:

"A Treatise of the Lawfulness of Hearing of the Ministers in the Church of England; penned by that learned and reverent Deuine, Mr. John Robinsz, late Pastor to the English Church of God in Leyden. Printed according to the copie that was



found in his Studie after his decease, and now published for the common good.”<sup>1</sup>

This manuscript was printed in 1634, nine years after Robinson's death, by his friends and followers. The publishers kept it back for nine years out of respect to the spirit of its author. Their preface tells us that they are aware that not all the Leyden brethren agreed with the pastor's position, and, therefore, knowing what his own will would have been in the matter of preserving harmony, they kept the manuscript. How truly they had interpreted their pastor's spirit will appear from the preface which he wrote for the treatise. There is hardly a whole book which he has left us that interprets him more deeply than these words, probably from the last year of his earthly life:

“As they that affect alienation from others make their differences as great, and the adverse opinion or practice as odious as they can, thereby to further their desired victory over them, and to harden themselves and their side against them, so, on the contrary, they who desire peace and accord both interpret things in the best part they reasonably can, and seek how and where they may find any lawful door of entry into accord and agreement with others: of which latter number

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 339-393.

I profess myself (by the grace of God) both a companion and a guide; especially in regard of my Christian countrymen, to whom God hath tied me in so many inviolable bonds; accounting it a cross that I am, in any particular, compelled to dissent from them, but a benefit and matter of rejoicing when I can in anything with good conscience unite with them in matter, if not in manner, or, where it may be, in both. And this affection, the Lord and my conscience are my witnesses, I have always nourished in my breast, even when I seemed furthest drawn from them: and so all that have taken knowledge of my course can testify with me, and how I have still opposed in others, and repressed in mine own people, to [the extent of] my power, all sour zeal against, and peremptory rejection of such [persons or practices] as whose holy graces challenge better use and respect from all Christians. And in testimony of my affection this way, and for the freeing of mine own conscience, I have penned this discourse, tending to prove the hearing of the Word of God preached by the ministers of the Church of England, able to open and apply the doctrines of faith by that church professed, both lawful, and, in cases, necessary for all of all sects or sorts of Christians, having opportunity and occasion of so doing, though sequestering themselves from all communion with the hierarchical order there established.

“Three sorts of opposites I make account to meet withal. The first, of them who truly desire and carefully endeavor to have their whole course

both in religion and otherwise framed by the holy and right seal of God's Word, either for their confirmation in the truth, or reformation wherein through human frailty they step aside. And unto them especially, I direct this my discourse, begging at His hands, who is the Father of lights, and from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift, for them as for myself, that, as he hath given us to set our faces toward heaven, and to seek him with the whole heart, so he would not suffer us to wander from his commandments to the right hand or to the left.

"A second sort is of them whose tender and scrupulous conscience makes them fearful and jealous of everything that hath in it the least appearance or show of evil, lest, coming too near it, they be defiled by it one way or other. This their godly zeal and tenderness of heart is to be loved of all men, and cherished by all good means. Only such are to be entreated for their own good to take knowledge of a distinction most useful for their direction in things lawful in their kind, and good in their right use: of which some are only naturally good in their kind, but not simply commanded of God, as to get and keep the riches and credit of the world, to enjoy outward peace, or other bodily comfort. Others are morally good in their kind and commanded of God, as to hear the Word of God, obey the magistrate, and the like. Now in things of the former sort, it is very requisite, considering both their nature and ours, that we keep a jealous eye and strait hand

over ourselves and our ways. . . . But now for the practice and performance of duties simply moral and commanded in their kind, as is the hearing of God's Word, especially by God's people, we ought to strain to the utmost, and to go as near the wind as may be. . . .

"A third sort of opposites I make account to meet with, more untractable than the former, and more vehemently bent against the thing propounded by me, out of prejudice and passion, than the other by scruple of conscience or show of reason. To them I can hardly say anything, it not being their manner to read or willingly to hear that which crosseth their prejudices. Yet something I must say touching them, out of the woeful experience of many years taken of them, though not much, I thank the Lord, amongst them unto whom I have ministered. Some of these I have found carried with so excessive admiration of some former guides in their course, as they think it half heresy to call into question any of their determinations, or practices. We must not think that only the Pharisees of old and Papists of later times are superstitiously addicted to the traditions of the elders and authority of the church. In all sects there are divers, especially of the weaker sort, who, being the less real in their conceptions are the more personal, that [sic] rather choose to follow the troad [i. e. trodden path] of blind tradition than the right way of God's Word by others to be shown them afterwards." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Lawfulness of Hearing," 3: 353-356.

We have made this long quotation from the preface to Robinson's defense of the Leyden practice not only because it epitomizes so much of his spirit and method in controversy, but also because of its intrinsic nobility of conception. In all the bitter contention, dreary argument, fierce invective and unfair device of the controversial literature that we have examined in the history of the Separation up to the year 1624, there is no sweeter, kindlier, braver utterance than this. It stands for "sweetness and light" in a wonderful degree. Especially important is this excerpt for comparison with the so-called "Farewell Address," which we shall consider later.

The argument of the treatise we will not follow in detail. The quotation given hints at the general nature of the discussion. The point worth noting is the relation of the argument to Robinson's emphasis in former writings upon the doctrine of the "connivance at sin" which impelled him to the rigid Separation. The general principle as enunciated by his opponents was,

"He that in anything partakes with that church in which sins known are suffered unreformed, partakes in all the sins of that church."<sup>1</sup>

This is a statement of the principle, however,

<sup>1</sup> "Lawfulness of Hearing," 3: 359.

which he himself might have made at the time of his controversy with Bernard (1610), and which he did make practically. But now his interpretation has changed. He says,

"I partake not in the sins of any, how great or manifest soever the sins be, or how near unto me soever the persons be except the same sins either be committed or remain unreformed by my fault. Otherwise, Christ our Lord had been enwrapped in the guilt of a world of sins in the Jewish Church, with which church he communicated in God's ordinances, living and dying a member thereof."<sup>1</sup>

Hence Robinson holds it to be

"a most vain imagination that everyone that partakes with a church in things lawful joins with it in upholding the things unlawful found in it."<sup>2</sup>

This is a most significant change. Here Bernard and Ames both might have taken their position in seeking to rebut the favorite Separatist argument. Robinson has wrested the strongest element out of the old argument in thus taking refuge behind this idea of personal responsibility.

When we test Robinson's practice by his theory we have several sources from which we get light upon it. Perhaps the chief of these is Winslow's incident regarding David Calderwood of

<sup>1</sup> "Lawfulness of Hearing," 3:359.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

Scotland, which is in his "*Hypocrisie Unmasked*," p. 96.<sup>1</sup> David Calderwood was the author of a book entitled "*Perth Assembly*," which was printed by William Brewster at his fugitive shop for setting type in Leyden, in 1619. The book aroused the fiercest rage of King James I and all the officers of the church, who were determined to force episcopacy upon Scotland, and Calderwood escaped to Holland from Scotland in August, 1619.<sup>2</sup> Calderwood was a personal friend of Robinson and was accustomed to hear Robinson preach. When the church came to the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Calderwood asked permission to remain to witness it, and Robinson answered him, —

"Reverend Sir, you may not onely stay to behold us, but partake with us, if you please, for wee acknowledge the Churches of Scotland to be the Churches of Christ."

Calderwood declined the courtesy. But the meaning of Robinson's invitation is certainly clear enough. He practiced as he taught while pastor of the Leyden Church.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Dexter, "*Congregationalism as Seen*," p. 396.

<sup>2</sup> Arber, "*Story of the Pilgrim Fathers*," p. 239 ff.





IX

CHURCH POLITY IN LEYDEN AND  
AMSTERDAM



## CHAPTER IX

### CHURCH POLITY IN LEYDEN AND AMSTERDAM

FROM this study of Robinson's most significant contribution to the history of the Separation, which from its very nature is peculiarly of permanent interest and present value, we turn to a study of his position in the polity of the Separatist churches. The aristocratic tendencies in Barrow's teaching and the democratic elements in Browne's have been outlined. The working out of the two ideals in the life of an organized church was confined chiefly to Amsterdam. Robinson was not so directly concerned in the struggle as were Johnson and Ainsworth. He was drawn into it, however, and bore a large part not only in the definition of the theory but also in the determination of the practice of the Congregational polity. The struggle assumes an added significance when it is remembered that these are the teachings of the man most influential in molding the political ideals of the Pilgrim Fathers.

The removal of the Scrooby church from Amsterdam to Leyden was occasioned very largely by

the fact that "ye flames of contention" were perceived by Robinson as about to break out in the Ancient Church. This contention was partly concerning the place and authority of the eldership in the government of the church. It was simply the outward manifestation of a general haziness which prevailed in the teaching of the earlier Separatists. This teaching it is not easy to classify. The terms of modern political science could not have been used then; words which we have learned to ennoble were then considered to be terms of indignity. Many a name given in contempt becomes in the course of time the pride and boast of a party. Hence, we must not be surprised to find Robinson seeking to shun the reproach of a name the glory of which we are glad to assume. Underneath the different terms we must search for the real facts of the teaching of these men, and not suffer ourselves to wonder too much at frequent inconsistency and obscurity.

In the case of Francis Johnson, pastor of the Ancient Church in Amsterdam, there is clear enough evidence of a decided bent toward the aristocratic emphasis in Barrow. His own experiences with his church probably increased the tendency, for he would not care to trust too much to the popular judgment as to the Christian character of his

own family relations. He went on until he became, in the words of Robinson, "immoderately jealous for the officers' dignity." The whole emphasis of the pastor was, therefore, laid increasingly upon the power of the elders.

Against this tendency Henry Ainsworth, the teacher, set himself, supported by a minority of the congregation. But in doing this he did not become the advocate of the full power of the people in self-government. That would have been democracy, and to advocate democracy was to become the champion of all that is confusing and disruptive in orderly government, according to the generally accepted ideas even of the Separatists themselves.

When Robinson issued his "Justification of Separation" in 1610, his teaching in reference to the eldership was displeasing to Johnson. He took Robinson's book into the meeting place and

"there before the congregation made a solemn testification against the manifold errors contained in it, which he disclaimed, and not only so, but wrote letters to M[r.] *Robinson* to rebuke him for the same."<sup>1</sup>

It was probably in reply to these letters, no traces of which are at present known, or in the

<sup>1</sup> Lawne, "Prophane Schisme," p. 76.

correspondence called out by the difference in practice, that Robinson warned Johnson against overthrowing the constitution of the church by his practice. This letter was read publicly in a meeting of the Ancient Church, and

“Master *Johnson* hath thereupon said, let master Robinson then looke to the constitution of his church.”<sup>1</sup>

Johnson was very outspoken in his condemnation of the practice of Robinson in Leyden, calling it “the confusion of Korah and his companie.” The pastors were thus set in direct opposition; and then the deacons joined in the conflict. Deacon Daniel Studley of Amsterdam wrote a letter to Deacon Samuel Fuller of Leyden, in which he described the whole company of the brethren at Leyden as

“ignorant idiots, noddy Nabalites, dogged Doegs, fairfaced Pharisees, shameless Shemeites, malicious Machiauellians.”<sup>2</sup>

Lawne makes fun of this “Alphabeticall slanderer,” and it is not difficult to imagine that Studley’s tirade caused Pastor Robinson and Deacon Fuller a hearty laugh together.

An open rupture came in Amsterdam between

<sup>1</sup> Lawne, “Prophane Schisme,” p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

the followers of Francis Johnson, called the "Franciscans," and the followers of Ainsworth, the teacher of the church, called the "Ainsworthians." The sympathies of the Leyden men were, of course, with the latter. This was evident enough from the manner in which the arguments of Robinson in his "Justification of Separation" had provoked Johnson and buttressed the positions of Ainsworth. When Ainsworth proposed, therefore, that the counsel of Robinson and his church be sought for settling the quarrel, Johnson's party refused to accept their advice. Then about thirty members of the Ancient Church, supporters of Ainsworth, wrote to the Leyden church, rehearsed the trouble, and asked for help toward a settlement. At the same time they informed the brethren in Leyden that the elders (who were, practically, according to Johnson's teaching, the church) would not *approve* the entrance of Robinson's members into the affair, but would *permit* it, if the Leyden brethren would come in either on their own initiative or at the request of the Ainsworthians.<sup>1</sup>

To this rather humiliating request Robinson made a dignified reply. This was not directed to the thirty who had sent his people the request,

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 470.

but to the entire officers and membership of the Ancient Church. With skill, wisdom and kindness Robinson laid the request of the thirty before them, and then said that his people were not willing to come into the matter except they were called for counsel by the whole church and unless there were some hope of a successful issue of the business.

The Ancient Church refused to approve of any interference for counsel on the part of the Leyden brethren. Robinson wrote twice to the same effect, and twice his advances were repulsed. He gave up then any hope of helping in a dignified way. In the meantime the majority deposed Ainsworth from his office as teacher. Robinson had not been standing for his dignity or privilege merely. When matters came to this critical pass he was ready to do anything in the interests of peace. A delegation went up to Amsterdam. Robinson was

“chief of the messengers sent; which had that good effect, as that they revoked the said deposition [of Ainsworth from his office as teacher,] and confessed their rashness and error, and lived together in peace some good time after.”<sup>1</sup>

The two factions were not quiet, however, in spite of Robinson's most persistent and kindly

<sup>1</sup> Gov. Bradford's "Dialogue" in "N. E. Memorial," Boston, 1855, p. 330.



efforts to heal the breach. Ainsworth secured the attendance of Robinson and his delegates in Amsterdam a second time. Then Johnson proposed that those members of his church who could not agree to his methods in church government should be dismissed to Leyden. The consent of Robinson was secured. The end seemed to be in sight, when suddenly the Ancient Church repudiated the agreement, giving as their reason a fear that the dismissed members would not leave Amsterdam, but would take their letters, and, later, receive dismissal from the Leyden church for the purpose of forming a new congregation in Amsterdam. Nothing less would satisfy the Franciscans than the complete expulsion of the Ainsworthians from Amsterdam. Thus ended all Robinson's attempts to bring about a settlement.

The next proposition came from Johnson, who outlined a scheme of "double practicè," whereby the Ancient Church was to keep together as an organization, and yet each party was to manage regarding the eldership according to its own convictions. This was in November, 1610. Robinson saw that such a condition of armed neutrality never would succeed. He therefore proposed a "middle way" of practice for them. Any matter of church discipline was to be brought first

before the elders as the proper governors of the church; if it could be settled there, the decision was final; if not, the case was to be brought "to the church of elders and brethren to be judged there."<sup>1</sup>

In proposing this plan Robinson saw clearly that it meant a mutual surrender, and he foresaw success only on condition that "it would please the Lord so far to enlarge your hearts on both sides, brethren, as that this middle way be held." Robinson did not commend this method of conducting a church's affairs because he considered it the best one under normal conditions, but because he thought it might be a helpful compromise measure under the conditions obtaining in Amsterdam. He stated expressly that this was not the practice of the Leyden church in the conduct of its business.

The proposition of the middle way did not succeed. Ainsworth was deposed from his office, and his followers were excommunicated from the Ancient Church. Robinson was persistent in his efforts for peace, and the dignity and resourcefulness of the Leyden pastor are evident throughout the entire transaction.

Lawne gives us a picture of one of the confer-

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 468.

ences in Amsterdam, which shows us some of the difficulties of a practical sort with which Robinson was obliged to contend in these negotiations:

“When some of master *Ainsworth*’s companie wrote unto master *Robinson*, desiring him to come and helpe the Lord against the mightie (against master Johnson, whom they had accounted as the strongest Giant of the Separation) master Robinson at last came unto them to dispute with master Johnson about the change of his gouernment; and being come and entred within the listes of that disputation, he found master Ainsworth’s faction so disorderly and clamorous, that he often desired them to be still and silent, and reprov’d their vnseemly and vnreasonable behaviour; but at length when he saw the tumult encrease, (looking vpon them round about, as a man amazed and agast, with fierce and outragious carriage) he did then openly testifie among them, *That he had rather walke in peace with five godly persons, than to live with five hundred or five thousand such unquiet persons as these were.*”<sup>1</sup>

Johnson then assured Robinson that the behaviour of the Ainsworthians which seemed so disorderly was really nothing when compared with the manner in which they ordinarily carried themselves. Robinson’s self-command appears all the more from such comparisons as these. There

<sup>1</sup> “*Prophane Schisme*,” p. 84.

is no wonder that the Ancient London Church was disrupted. There was no master spirit in control.

It is not difficult to determine Robinson's theory of church government from his writings. A brief statement of it has been made in the chapter on his definition of the Separation in the controversy with Bernard. This is contemporary with his effort to aid in the solution of the eldership question in Amsterdam. In 1619 Robinson published his "*Apologia*" in Latin, which was issued in 1625 in English under the title, "*A Just and Necessary Apology of Certain Christians, no less contumeliously than commonly called Brownists or Barrowists.*"<sup>1</sup> Its purpose was to make clear the differences between the Reformed Churches and the Leyden Church, and also to differentiate the latter from other Separatist congregations. The fourth chapter in this "*Apology*" is entitled "*Of the Ecclesiastical Presbytery.*" The general position maintained, however, is not materially changed from that of 1610. Robinson's system of government is neither positively one thing nor another. Its theory wavers. He believed that no person should be chosen to the office of an elder unless he were able to teach, exhort

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: p. 1-79.

and defend the faith in any public gathering as well as in private meetings.<sup>1</sup> The elders should be chosen for a term of service lasting through life. The chief point, however, was that the elders ought not to exercise their power in private. To meet apart from the congregation for deliberation concerning any matters properly within their jurisdiction was right. But all their official action must be public. The practice in the Reformed churches, where the secret meetings of the elders made it impossible for the people to know or approve their actions, was, Robinson firmly held, entirely wrong. Indeed, he went so far as to say that, between the interpretation of the command, "Tell the church," which made the term "church" equivalent to the Anglican bishops and their officers, and that which made it equivalent to "the senate of elders excluding the people," the former meaning was far nearer the truth, for the bishops and their officers did not exclude the people from the consistories, but presented there their judgment to the people.

It is interesting to see this kindlier view of episcopacy and the consistory, against which Robinson had once written so bitterly and which here he considers in a fairer light although without approval.

<sup>1</sup> "Apology," 3: 28-41.

The difference between the two systems of government comes out clearly only when we take a specific instance by which to test it. This test is the matter of church discipline. How was an offender to be treated? Robinson's answer to the question is clear. He held the censure of offenders for any private or public scandal to be the function of the elders, and granted that, in a "well-ordered state of the church," the performance of this function might be left to the elders alone with safety; nevertheless it never could be rightly performed without the knowledge and consent of the people. An offender must not be judged by the elders alone, "but by the church with them, though governed by them."

According to this theory, which may seem to be somewhat loosely defined, Robinson administered the affairs of the Leyden church successfully. He wrote to the Amsterdam brethren,

"We safely say, so far as we remember, that there never came complaint of sin to the church since we were officers, but we [i. e. the officers] took knowledge of it before [it was brought openly before the whole body of the church members], either by mutual consent on both sides, or at least, by the party accused; with whose Christian modesty and wisdom we think it well sorteth, that being condemned by two or three brethern, he

should not trouble the church, or hazard a public rebuke upon himself, without counselling with them who are set over him, and who either are or should be best able to advise him.”<sup>1</sup>

There is a still more specific illustration of the manner in which Robinson steered between aristocracy and democracy in the government of the congregation. When the church in London sought the judgment of the churches in Leyden and Amsterdam concerning the wisdom of retaining in fellowship the young woman who had attended Anglican worship, Robinson answered,

“he conceives it not orderly that the bodies of churches should be sent to for counsel, but some choice persons. Power and authority are in the body for elections and censures, but counsel for direction in all affairs, in some few; in which regard every particular church has appointed its eldership for ordinary counsellors, to direct it and the members thereof in all difficulties; with whom others are also to advise upon occasions, specially ordinary.”<sup>2</sup>

From all these sources it is evident that Robinson took every possible course to avoid the idea of democracy. As he asks Johnson, “Where do I in all this book, [The Justification of Separa-

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 473, 474.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 3: 382.

tion,] as is imputed to me, advance the people, as others do the prelates, and make them idols?"<sup>1</sup> He held that the officers were the governors of the congregation; the people, the governed; and that power and government were two entirely different things. The government was with the officers; the power lay in the whole church, in the people.

Robinson's writings are consistent in their teaching, as his practical administration of the Leyden church preserved the function of the church officers and the power of the congregation for self-government. He turned the tide that set toward oligarchy on the one hand, and he saved the Separation from alliance with dangerous anarchistic tendencies. He avoided the word democracy; with the content which the term then bore, this was an act of wisdom. It was a true democracy for which he stood, however, and into the possession of which he guided the Congregational churches.

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 481.



X

PROSPEROUS YEARS IN LEYDEN



## CHAPTER X

### PROSPEROUS YEARS IN LEYDEN

RETURNING now to the story of the church in Leyden, we must pick up the thread of the narrative which was dropped at the close of Chapter VI, at which point it seemed necessary to look in detail at the matter of Robinson's theology, his practice in regard to communion, and his relation to the other Separatists in respect to the eldership.

The complete organization of the church took place after they were established in Leyden. As we should naturally expect from Robinson's theories in regard to the matter, this was very simple. He had only one elder associated with him. This was William Brewster.<sup>1</sup> He was chosen to the office of ruling elder; but this, according to Robinson's theory, implied that he was qualified to be teaching elder as well. This position Brewster still held after the church had emigrated to Plymouth, and in their services there used to call upon such men as Winslow, Bradford and Morton

<sup>1</sup> Bradford, "Of Plimoth Plantation," p. 17.

to pray or give exhortations in the public services.<sup>1</sup>

Two deacons were also chosen to office while the church was in Leyden. These were Samuel Fuller and John Carver, both of whom bore an active part in the controversies of the time in Leyden and rendered great service to the church in Plymouth.

So far as we can determine this was the full number of the church's officers so long as they remained in Leyden. There can be no question as to the harmony of this governing body. Brewster, Fuller and Carver were in most perfect sympathy. They accepted the leadership of the pastor in all his changing views concerning communion, and held with him regarding the eldership. He was the dominant force in their counsels, and the concord and strength of the Leyden church grew in no slight degree from the personal qualities of the pastor and his three associates.

Robinson's work in the church was constant. He preached twice on Sundays at services which were probably quite like those held by the churches in Amsterdam, which were thus described by Richard Clifton:

<sup>1</sup> Cotton, "An Account, etc.," in *Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll. Series 1*, Vol. 4, pp. 108, 118, 136.

1. Prayer and giving of thanks by the pastor or teacher.
2. The Scriptures are read, two or three chapters, as time serves, with a brief explanation of their meaning.
3. The pastor or teacher then takes some passage of Scripture, and expounds and enforces it.
4. The sacraments are administered.
5. Some of the Psalms of David are sung by the whole congregation, both before and after the exercise of the Word.
6. Collection is then made, as each one is able, for the support of the officers and the poor.<sup>1</sup>

That this was the general form observed in Leyden we are quite sure. One of the records of the church in Plymouth contains this answer made by them to the objection current against them in England that the sacraments were not administered frequently enough:

"The more is our grief that our pastor is kept from us, by whom we might enjoy them, for we used to have the Lord's supper every sabbath, and baptism as often as there was occasion of children to baptize."<sup>2</sup>

Robinson's relations to the Reformed, or Cal-

<sup>1</sup> Clifton's "Advertisement," quoted in Robinson's Works, 3: 485.

<sup>2</sup> Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., 1795, Series 1, Vol. 4, p. 108.

vinistic, churches of the city comes into view naturally at this point. In the year 1617 Paget wrote his "An Arrow against the Separation of the Brownists," in which he shows the inconsistency between Robinson's arguments concerning the use of churches in his controversy with Bernard (1610)<sup>1</sup> and his practice in Leyden, where "hath he for this long time tolerated *Mr. Br[ewster]* to heare the word of God in such places."

"And not onely this," Paget continues, "but now of late this last moneth [June or July, 1617] as is witnessed unto me, he, seeing (as it appears) how rashly and unsoundly he hath written against Mr. Bernard in this poynt, begins openly in the middle of his congregation to plead for the lawful use of these temples."<sup>2</sup>

This specific item of the use of churches erected and decorated according to the religious principles of earlier days was only one element in the larger matter of the communion which Robinson thought permissible held between the Separatists and members of the Reformed churches. Certainly in Leyden with Robinson's sanction there was a great deal of liberty allowed members of the church. And this involved a criticism which, along with other more serious charges, Robinson

<sup>1</sup> Works, 2: 468-472.

<sup>2</sup> Paget, "An Arrow," pp. 28, 29.

sought to meet by the publication of a Latin "Apologia" in the year 1619. Here Robinson set forth at considerable length the differences between the two religious bodies.

It is interesting just here to notice one of the causes which led Robinson to issue the "Apology." An anonymous Dutch poem had been extensively circulated in which the Reformed Church in the Netherlands was compared to a tree, and all the dissenting sects to certain beasts which were zealously endeavoring to overthrow the tree. But the stinging taunt of this poem bore hardest against the Separatists or Brownists, as they were called, who were likened "to a little worm, gnawing at the root thereof, and not having less will, but less power to hurt than the residue."<sup>1</sup> This anonymous poem was a shaft sent home to Robinson's soul. It hurt worse than any more dignified assault could have done.

The points of difference, as Robinson draws them out, demand only a brief notice. In doctrine, barring the one item of the authority of the Apocryphal books of Scripture, the agreement between the Separatists and the Reformed churches is absolute.

But the Separatists hold that no church, accord-

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3:8.

ing to the New Testament model, ought to consist of more members than can meet together in one place; that only such children as are in covenant relations with the church by virtue of their parents are subjects for infant baptism; that reading forms of prayer is not right; that the elders ought all to be able to teach, also to serve for life, and to administer their official duties in public and not in "their private consistory." These are the more important items in the discussion. But the significance of the "Apology" lies in the gentler tones in which the controversy is carried on. It is conciliatory and kindly. Nothing could better illustrate the deepening process in Robinson's life than a contrast between the temper of his first writings in 1609 and 1610, and this book from a time ten years later. All the possible points of agreement are mentioned here before the issue is outlined.<sup>1</sup> The arguments of the Anglican opponents are brought up, not "by way of accusation," but only for the purpose of self-defense. The language used to describe the condition of the parishes has lost its venom. Even the bishops are mentioned in a kindly way, and Robinson brings forward the fact that, during the persecutions under Queen Mary, many of them gave their

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 64-70.



lives in witness for the truth. The conforming Puritans are not rebuked so harshly.

It lets us quickly into the comprehension of this gracious spirit of the "Apology" to read a part of the concluding paragraph:

"And here thou hast, Christian reader, the whole order of our conversation in the work of Christian religion, set down as briefly and plainly as I could. If in any thing we err, advertise us brotherly. . . . Err we may, alas! too easily: but heretics, by the grace of God we will not be."

And at the very end Robinson wrote this petition:

"This alone remaineth, that we turn our faces and mouths unto thee, O most powerful Lord and gracious Father, humbly imploring help from God towards those who are by men left desolate. There is with thee no respect of persons, neither are men less regarders of thee if regarders of thee for the world's disregarding them. They who truly fear thee, and work righteousness, although constrained to live by leave in a foreign land, exiled from country, spoiled of goods, destitute of friends, few in number, and mean in condition, are for all that unto thee, O gracious God, nothing the less acceptable. Thou numberest all their wanderings, and puttest their tears into thy bottles. Are they not written in thy book? Towards thee, O Lord, are our eyes; confirm our hearts, and bend thine ear,

and suffer not our feet to slip, or our face to be ashamed, O thou both just and merciful God. To him through Christ be praise forever in the church of saints; and to thee, loving and Christian reader, grace, peace and eternal happiness. Amen."

The man who could write such words was one to whom the conditions of his exile were a constant pain. There is no mock humility or attempt to plead the misery of his lot purely for the purposes of argument here. One can see the sensitive spirit of Robinson bearing the peculiar grief of his humiliation, and trusting implicitly the infinite resources of his God. This prayer comes out of his heart. It shows a sensitive, gracious, proud spirit, trusting his God and doing his work without dejection.

The prosperous years in Leyden were filled with other minor controversies in which the clear thinking and wise control of Robinson appear. One of these gives us a glimpse of the inner life of the church in its meetings. It is the controversy with John Yates concerning the matter of "prophesying out of office," or the whole matter of lay preaching. In his "Justification of Separation" (1610) Robinson took the ground that any person who had received the gift of public address or prayer which could be used in the church for

edification, exhortation or comfort, was bound to exercise this gift in public meetings of the church. Women were barred out, however, by the direct command of the Scriptures that they must keep silence in the churches.<sup>1</sup> This function, Robinson held, was to be exercised apart from any official connection with the church, as a part of every believer's duty and privilege.

This position seems to have been unwelcome to many of Robinson's friends around Norwich, and one of them, William Euring, copied out the arguments from "Justification" and gave them to Rev. John Yates, with the request that they be publicly refuted by him. From these abstracts, and a later acquaintance with the book itself, Yates preached on the matter, and also wrote a refutation of Robinson's position. The sermon notes and the manuscript refutation, attested by a magistrate, were sent to Robinson in Leyden by William Euring. In reply, Robinson published "The People's Plea for the Exercise of Prophecy, against Mr. John Yates his Monopolie. By John Robinson."<sup>2</sup> (1618.)

The treatise itself is one of the most tedious that we have from Robinson's pen. It consists

<sup>1</sup> "Justification," 2: 246, 248.

<sup>2</sup> Works, 3: 285-335.

very largely in a detailed exegesis of passages of Scripture. Robinson stoutly maintains that the right to speak in public for the purpose of edifying, exhorting or comforting the church is a duty laid upon every member as well as upon the officers of the church. He is obliged to guard himself from the false position into which his opponents put him as they reduced his proposition to the absurdity that every member of a congregation was bound to speak in public. It is only those male members who have the gift of public address who are so bound, Robinson holds.

The Leyden congregation seems to have suffered from the abuse of privilege even in that early day, for Robinson says:

“Neither . . . are they that speak in the exercise of prophecy to make a sermon by an hour-glass; . . . that were to abuse the time and wrong the gifts of others; but briefly to speak a word of exhortation, as God enableth, and that after the ministerial teaching be ended (as Acts 13), questions about other things delivered, and with them even disputations.”<sup>1</sup>

One of the most interesting stories in the history of Robinson's congregation in Leyden is that which grows out of the offense given to King

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 327.

James I by Elder William Brewster in the printing of Calderwood's odious book, "Perth Assembly." We find no mention of the perils of the ruling elder during these months in any of Robinson's writing. And Bradford has given us only a paragraph concerning the fact that Elder Brewster was able, toward the latter part of his stay in Holland, to set up a place for printing. This meant that he had the type, and not, it is most likely, that he had a press. His partner was Thomas Brewer, who had a house near Robinson's.

We know the general course of this difficulty between the English and Dutch officials and the Elder of Robinson's church, from the correspondence concerning it which is preserved in the Public Record Office in London.<sup>1</sup> For over a year following the time when the offensive book was first found by Sir Dudley Carleton, on July 27, 1619, Brewster was the object of a keen search, and often escaped narrowly. At one time, about September 23, 1619, he was supposed to be safely in the hands of the authorities; but a drunken officer took the wrong man and Brewster escaped. Brewer, however, was arrested and the type seized. At this point the Leyden church appeared on the scene, offering bail for Brewer's

<sup>1</sup> Given in full in Arber, "Story of the Pilgrim Fathers," pp. 195 ff.

release and insisting upon the privileges which he could claim for trial at the university as one of its members. The students also were stirred up by the Separatists to claim these privileges for their fellow. Brewer finally consented to go to England, and Robinson went with him to Rotterdam, where he was to take passage for England. The journey was deferred for some time, owing to contrary winds. During this time Robinson had probably returned to Leyden. And we get a glimpse of the sternness and gravity of their life there in a letter which Sir Dudley Carleton writes:

"I hope it [the fleet about to sail] will carry over Sir William Zouche and Master Brewer to your Honour; who have lain long together at Flushing; and his fellow Brownists at Leyden are somewhat scandalized, because they hear Sir William hath taught him to drink healths."

We can almost hear the chuckle with which these representatives of King James would speak of this "fall from grace" on the part of Brewer. It is quite likely that a knowledge of the weaknesses of his parishioner may have been the motive which led Robinson to go with him to Rotterdam.

Brewster never was apprehended. The Leyden church shielded him successfully. Too much credit cannot be given Robinson and his congre-

gation for their loyal support during that year of trial.

Robinson was kept busy with the defense of the Separation from all sorts of attacks. One of these came from Thomas Helwisse, leader of John Smyth's church in Amsterdam after his death in 1609. He did not remain long in the pastoral office, owing to his conviction that flight under persecution was wrong. Therefore he, with a considerable number of his followers, returned to England. From there he published a defense of himself and his friends in their action under the title, "A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity." (1612.) In this work Helwisse not only advanced arguments to prove that it was wrong to flee from persecution and to remain in exile because of it, but also heaped reproaches upon the Separatist leaders who had fled to Holland and were remaining there under those conditions. He held that this flight from persecution had resulted in

"the overthrow of religion in this island [England]; the best, ablest, and greater part being gone, and leaving behind them some few who, by the others' departure, have had their affliction and contempt increased, hath been the cause of many falling back, and of their adversaries' rejoicing.'" <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. H. Newman, "A History of the Baptist Churches in the United States." 1894, pp. 38-47.

Helwisse made Robinson in particular the object of his attack<sup>1</sup> in this regard, as a leader of the emigration to escape persecution. In replying to the charge Robinson gives a clear statement of the unanimity with which the original movement to Holland was carried out. He says,

“And for drawing over the people, I know none of the guides but were as much drawn over by them as drawing them. The truth is, it was Mr. Helwisse who above all, either guides or others, furthered this passage into strange countries: and if any brought oars, he brought sails.”<sup>2</sup>

Robinson meets the arguments which Helwisse advanced from the Scripture example of Jacob, Moses, David, and Joseph carrying the infant Jesus into Egypt. The discussion is not significant enough, however, to delay us longer. It was one of those over-refinements of scrupulous conscientiousness which had involved John Smyth in many troubles and plunged his successor into woe. It was a sporadic appearance of quite unwarranted criticism.

This matter of flight in times of persecution did not end Robinson's difficulties with Helwisse. Smyth and Helwisse went together into the

<sup>1</sup> “Of Religious Communion,” 3: 160.

<sup>2</sup> Works, 3: 159.



formation of a new church in Amsterdam on the basis of another baptism than the one that they had received. Robinson describes this action as follows:

"Mr. Smyth, Mr. Helwisse, and the rest, having utterly dissolved and disclaimed their former church, came together to erect a new church by baptism; unto which they also ascribed so great virtue, as that they would not so much as pray together before they had it. And after some straining of courtesy who should begin, and that, of John Baptist, Matt. 3:14 misalleged, Mr. Smyth baptized first himself, and next Mr. Helwisse, and so the rest, making their particuliar confessions."<sup>1</sup>

Robinson says that he heard this from Smyth and Helwisse themselves.

The discussion that follows is interesting chiefly because of its bearing upon the positions held by the Separatists relative to those of the Anabaptists. Joseph Hall, in his first discussion with Robinson, sought to force him to the Anabaptist grounds, i.e. that rebaptism is necessary for those who separate from a church order which they hold to be false. Hall put the dilemma in this way:

"If wee bee a true Church, you must returne. If wee bee not . . . you must rebaptize."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 168.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, "Common Apologie," p. 26.

Helwisse and his successor, Murton, followed the same line of argument which Hall used. Helwisse carried his charges so far as to assert that, if the Separatists did not rebaptize they were "of the world, infidels, haters of Christ, and what not." He said, in substance, the Separatists call the Anglicans Babylon, yet they retain the Anglican baptism, and are thereby sealed into the covenant of grace by the seal of Babylon. This charge Robinson met in this proposition:<sup>1</sup>

"We retain the seal of the covenant of grace, though ministered in Babylon; and not the baptism of Babylon, but the baptism of the Lord in itself and by the Babylonians spiritually usurped and profaned; but by faith and the Spirit, now sanctified to our use."

Baptism has in it two elements, one essential and the other accidental. The first is the use of water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the seal of the covenant of grace; the other is accidental, the manner of administering the essential rite, which includes the minister, the recipient, and the communion in which the rite is bestowed. The essential baptism may be administered and received in the Roman Catholic or the Anglican Church, although the manner of administering it be

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 167.

wholly false. If the outer baptism, administered in a false church order, be nevertheless a sign of the inner baptism of the Spirit, it is a true spiritual ordinance, though abased and abused. Such the baptism of the Church of England was to the Separatists, and, therefore, they retain it.

A long discussion concerning the proper subject of baptism, which Robinson carried on against Helwisse and Murton, is only a reassertion of the Separatist principle that the children of parents who are in covenant relations with God are themselves comprehended in all the privileges of their parents, "as the branches in the roots." Infants are, therefore, proper subjects for baptism. Robinson adds nothing new to the familiar arguments on this point.

Robinson's ministry in Leyden was not confined absolutely to his own congregation, although he always thought of his work as primarily concerned with the particular congregation over which he was set. In reply to Helwisse, however, Robinson asserted that he had "so preached to others in those cities, as that by the blessing of God working with us, we have gained more to the Lord than Mr. Helwisse's church consists of."<sup>1</sup> These converts in Amsterdam and Leyden must

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 160.

have come from English-speaking people, and were probably from the large number of Puritans who were resident in Holland either voluntarily for business reasons or on account of persecution in England. The fact that Robinson was recognized as a preacher of power is indicated by the fact that David Calderwood, author of the "Perth Assembly," published in 1619, and so odious to King James, was a very close friend of Robinson and accustomed to attend service in Robinson's church in order to hear him preach.<sup>1</sup>

Robinson formed many other close friendships with strong men during these prosperous years in Leyden. With some of these he agreed and with some he differed. William Ames, Robert Parker, David Calderwood and Henry Jacob were members of the circle of his friends in Leyden. From them he received many a personal influence which changed his thought and practice. To one of them, at least, he gave that peculiar direction which led him to become the founder of the Independent churches in England. This was Henry Jacob.

Concerning the peace and order of the Leyden church there is no question. It was not until

<sup>1</sup> Winslow's "Hypocrisie Unmasked," quoted in Dexter, "Congregationalism as Seen," p. 396, note 126.

1645 that Robert Baylie of Glasgow, in his "A Dissuasive from the Errors of the Time," claimed that Robinson's congregation was nearly destroyed by internal dissensions. Winslow disputed this in his "Hypocrisie Unmasked," in 1646, and John Cotton proved the statement false by his "The Way of Congregational Churches cleared from the Historical Aspersions of Mr. Robert Baylie," published in 1648. Winslow's testimony concerning the condition of the church in Leyden is worthy of careful reading:

"For I persuade myself, never people upon earth lived more lovingly together and parted more sweetly than we, the Church at Leyden, did; not rashly, in a distracted humor, but upon joint and serious deliberation, often seeking the mind of God by fasting and prayer; whose gracious presence we not only found with us, but his blessing upon us, from that time to this instant, to the indignation of our adversaries, the admiration of strangers, and the exceeding consolation of ourselves, to see such effects of our prayers and tears before our pilgrimage here be ended."<sup>1</sup>

Busy thus with study, controversy, preaching, parish work, and the sweet intimacies of friendship, Robinson spent the years in Leyden until he was called upon to make his last great sacrifice for the

<sup>1</sup> Winslow, "Hypocrisie Unmasked," in Young's "Chronicles," 1841, p. 380.

Separation and send the stronger part of his congregation out upon an enterprise which he had himself helped to plan for them. This was the exodus of the Pilgrim Fathers to America, which, although it seemed to be the pastor's greatest sacrifice, was destined to be the avenue of his greatest power.

XI

THE MOVEMENT TO AMERICA





## CHAPTER XI

### THE MOVEMENT TO AMERICA

IN spite of seeming success and prosperity in Leyden, Robinson and Brewster were both far-sighted enough to see very clearly that any extension of their ideas concerning church government was quite impossible among the Dutch. The persistence of their own congregation, in the face of influences necessarily springing from an environment in a strange land, appeared to them quite improbable also. The reasons which would naturally turn the minds of these men, who had known the hardship and pain of one exile already, toward another emigration were complex; but they may be reduced to three.

The first of these was the danger which threatened their cause if they should remain in Holland. The children of parents who have suffered for a principle never know fully what such championship costs, and they hold those principles less tenaciously than their fathers did. With the third generation the truth once thought worth dying for becomes far weaker in its grip upon the grandchildren.

Another motive was the missionary purpose. The savages in America offered a fresh field for the preaching of the gospel; this was a great motive in all the work of Robinson. When one of his opponents, Helwisse, charged him with cowardice in having fled from persecution in England, Robinson replied with a clear expression of his view concerning the supreme duty of preaching, even in exile. He claimed that no man was freed from his obligation to preach through the fact of his exile; but everywhere, even under the most distressing conditions, the minister must be a preacher. And Robinson never lost his missionary zeal.<sup>1</sup>

There was an additional motive which was very strong in the minds of Robinson and Brewster. It was their desire to find a place to live where their hardships of every kind might be lessened, in order that many persons, who chose to submit to the obnoxious ceremonies and the order of the church established by law in England, rather than to endure the shame of exile and the hardships of life in Holland, might come fully into the ranks of the Separation if those hardships were once removed. Robinson perceived the fact that there were many Puritans who would do this if only

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 160.

they "might have liberty and live comfortably." This point must not be underestimated in considering the purpose which induced the Leyden church to undertake the emigration. It undoubtedly played a very large part in Robinson's plans. And when we consider the weight which he gave to this reason in the light of the later history of the colonies in Massachusetts, we must be struck with the sagacity of Robinson. Exactly what he expected to happen did happen, and the Puritans became Separatists when, in America, the hardships of the Dutch life were removed. Robinson's analysis of the situation was remarkable for its clearness and foresight. It probably rested in no slight degree upon what he had himself seen in Leyden, where, under his own preaching, the Separation had made decided gains among the English-speaking residents. If this measure of success were possible in Leyden, how much more so under better conditions in America!

The idea was not entirely new. As early as 1597 members of the Barrowist group of Separatists in London petitioned to be allowed to form part of a projected colony in America, and Francis and George Johnson were allowed to go. But the whole expedition was a failure.<sup>1</sup> This very failure

<sup>1</sup> Dexter, "Congregationalism as Seen," pp. 277, 278.

was used as a taunt against Robinson by Joseph Hall, who said that the Separatists had been turbulent alike at home, in prison, in the Netherlands and "in the coasts of Virginia."

There is no doubt that the movement itself originated in the minds of Robinson and Brewster, "out of their Christian care of the flock of Christ committed to them."<sup>1</sup> The plan was thoroughly debated by Robinson and Brewster, and then was broached to certain more influential members of the congregation. After private discussion the matter was publicly proposed and debated. The congregation sought to know the will of God in the matter by fasting and prayer no less than by careful examination of the whole project from the standpoint of human wisdom.

This general method of proceeding is a practical illustration of the definite theory concerning the place of officers in the conduct of church affairs which Robinson consistently held. They took the lead; they discussed all projects fully; but the final decision of all questions rested with the church.

There seemed to be common agreement on the expediency of another move. The most desirable place to which to go involved the largest difficulty in settlement. Many were in favor of Guiana,

<sup>1</sup> Winslow, "Hypocrisy Unmasked," pp. 88, 89.

because the climate was tropical and life would be easy there. Others were stoutly inclined toward Virginia, because the English already had a foothold there, and it was not so thoroughly a movement into a foreign land. The objection to Virginia was that there also they would be liable to persecution on religious grounds. The final decision was "to live as a distinct body by themselves, under the general government of Virginia;" to petition King James to grant them freedom in religion, and, if this should be granted, to carry the enterprise forward, inasmuch as they had good hopes under such favorable conditions of backing from "Great Persons of good rank and quality."<sup>1</sup>

In carrying out this general plan the Leyden brethren began by sending Robert Cushman and John Carver to England to begin negotiations in 1617. The story of these negotiations in detail as they were carried forward in England does not concern our narrative. We will therefore only touch upon a point here and there in which it is possible to discover the signs of Robinson's activity in the matter. It is plain from the outset that Robinson and Brewster together were the persons of prime influence and authority in the project. They signed the articles which were sent by the

<sup>1</sup> Bradford, "Of Plimoth Plantation," pp. 36, 37.

Leyden church to Cushman and Carver for use in advancing their cause with the king. These articles<sup>1</sup> were doubtless drawn up by Robinson about November, 1617. They minimize the differences between the Separatists and members of the Church of England, and are in every way conciliatory and fraternal. The distinctive note of Robinson's teaching is the second article, which says:

"As we do acknowledge the doctrine of faith there [i. e. in the Church of England] taught, so do we [acknowledge] the fruits and effects of the same doctrine, to the begetting of saving faith in thousands in the land (Conformists and Reformists), as they are called, with whom also as with our brethren we do desire to keep spiritual communion in peace, and will practice on our parts all lawful things."

The delegates gained the help of Sir Edwin Sandys, and the articles were used very successfully in carrying forward the plans. In a letter in December, 1617, Sir Edwin Sandys wrote to Robinson and Brewster reporting progress in the plans and commending the delegates, who were about to return to Leyden for instructions.

To make clear the points which were obscure or unsatisfactory, Robinson and Brewster drew

<sup>1</sup> See N. Y. Hist. Soc. Coll., Series 2, Vol. 3, pp. 295-302.

up a statement, which was signed by a majority of the congregation. This was sent to the Council for Virginia by Carver and Cushman. They also sent a letter, in December, 1617, to Sir Edwin Sandys, expressing their personal gratitude to him for his services already rendered, and urging him to continue to help them.

But the king would not grant the Separatists religious freedom in explicit terms and under his seal. He went so far as to say, "that he would connive at them, and not molest them, provided they carried themselves peaceably." The Virginia Company sought to persuade the Leyden brethren to go on, trusting that everything would be as they wished in spite of the king's refusal positively to sanction their religious freedom.

When the agents returned to Leyden with this report there was a division of opinion in the church. Probably the majority were inclined to believe that this promise of King James was altogether too insecure a foundation upon which to risk a move which involved the selling of household goods and a long, perilous journey into a strange land. It was natural enough that this should be so. These men had learned prudence because they had suffered much.

On the other hand, "some of the Chiefest"

thought that they were quite warranted in proceeding even upon this very uncertain consent of the king. Among the "Chiefest" was surely enough Robinson, and Bradford gives us a little of his reasoning in the matter, which shows that he knew the character of kings, and of James in particular, pretty thoroughly. He argued that there was no special difference between the promises of King James, whether they were *intimated* or *confirmed*:

"For if, afterwards, there should be a purpose or desire to wrong them [the Separatists], though they had a seal as broad as the house floor, it would not serve the turn; for there would be means enough found to recall or reverse it. And seeing therefore the course was probable, they must rest herein on God's Providence, as they had done in other things."

A long time was consumed in the settling of these contrary opinions in Leyden. It was not until early in 1619 that Brewster and Cushman were sent to England to proceed with the Virginia Company and close also with the merchants who were to furnish or "adventure" the money for the ships and supplies. They found the Company in a hopeless wrangle. A patent was granted, however, June 19, 1619. But the long delays had disappointed their friends as well as themselves;



the merchants were no longer ready with their means. This patent never was used, for the Virginia Company was unable to lend any financial aid, and this was absolutely necessary to the Leyden brethren.

It was early in the year 1620 that the Leyden church, evidently discouraged at the seeming failure of their efforts in England, turned to the directors of the Dutch New Netherland Company for help. On the 11th of April, 1620, the States General rejected a petition of these directors, dated February 12, 1620, a paragraph of which refers to this action of the Leyden men. It is as follows:

“Now it happens that there is residing at Leyden a certain English Preacher, versed in the Dutch language, who is well inclined to proceed thither to live: assuring the Petitioners that he has the means of inducing over four hundred families to accompany him thither, both out of this country and England. Provided they would be guarded and preserved from all violence on the part of other potentates, by the authority and under the protection of your Princely Excellency and the High and Mighty Lords States General, in the propagation of the true pure Christian religion, in the instruction of the Indians in that country in true learning, and in converting them to the Christian faith: and thus, through the

mercy of the Lord, to the greater glory of this country, to plant there a new Commonwealth.”<sup>1</sup>

The directors petitioned that “the aforesaid Minister,” in whom we recognize Robinson, together with the families who were ready to follow him, be taken under Dutch protection and that two ships be sent to secure for that country the New Netherland, between New France and Virginia.

The petition was rejected, but another series of negotiations was begun with the Dutch immediately. This, however, was broken off by Robinson before April 11, 1620, at the request of a London merchant, Mr. Thomas Weston, to whose counsel Robinson took heed.<sup>2</sup> Weston had known the members of the Leyden congregation before, and now, after conferring with Robinson<sup>3</sup> and other influential members of the congregation, he persuaded them to go on with their plans, leaving the Dutch and depending upon the Virginia Company.

The details of the plan at length agreed upon need not concern us now. There were many vexations, uncertainties and trials attending the organization of the movement, but the resolution

<sup>1</sup> Arber, “The Story,” etc., pp. 297, 298.

<sup>2</sup> See Robinson’s letter to Carver, in Arber, “The Story,” etc., p. 317.

<sup>3</sup> Bradford, “Of Plimoth Plantation,” p. 54.

of the church was carried out in spite of all these. That final resolution was made at the close of a public fast, when it was decided: that the younger and stronger, volunteers only, should go first, and the remainder stay behind; that if the majority should volunteer to go, Pastor Robinson was to accompany them; if the minority went, Elder Brewster was to go; if the enterprise should be a success, then those who went should help the aged and poor who remained in Holland to come over to New England later.

The majority decided to remain, although the excess was only a few, and therefore Robinson remained behind and Brewster went with the minority. The church was curiously divided. They agreed to resolve themselves into distinct churches, although Robinson was still their pastor, and in case any came from Holland to America, or returned, they were to be received as members of the other body with no letter of dismission or commendation required. The organization of the church in this way is quite anomalous. But the whole purpose was to bring the united company together in the near future in the new home, and this doubtless seemed to warrant so strange a scheme of church order.

So the time drew near for the separation of the

little church. Winslow and Bradford describe the last meeting at Leyden on the evening of July 30, 1620. It was a day of great joy and sadness alike. Winslow says that those who were to remain in Holland "feasted us that were to go, at our Pastor's house, [it] being large," and describes the effect of the singing as "the sweetest melody that ever mine ears heard," for many of the congregation were very expert at music. Bradford speaks of the event as "a Day of Solemn Humiliation," when Robinson preached a sermon which was drawn from Ezra 8: 21, and with which "he spent a good part of the day very profitably and suitable to their present condition."

The next day, Friday, July 31, 1620, they left Leyden and, accompanied by the larger part of those who were to remain behind, went to Delfshaven, where they were to go on board the ship that was waiting for them. Here several friends from Amsterdam met them, and they spent the evening together. Robinson was still with his church.

The next morning, August 1, they went on board the ship. Every moment was spent in leave-taking.

"But the tide, which stays for no man, calling them away that were thus loath to depart; their

Reverend Pastor, falling down on his knees, and they all with him, with watery cheeks, commended them, with most fervent prayers, to the Lord and his blessing. And then, with mutual embraces and many tears, they took their leaves one of another; which proved to be the last leave to many of them."<sup>1</sup>

These closing scenes in the history of the Leyden church, thus together for the last time on the soil of Holland, have been a favorite subject for the imaginative lover of the story. Robinson has been described as taking leave of the members of his flock in different ways and places; but however varied the objective setting of the scene, one point is surely fixed and clear. It was a day of the deepest significance to Robinson himself. Years afterward the memory of it was clear to Bradford. It must have been an hour of anguish to Robinson. Here were the strongest members of the church which he had built up and served, a numerical minority, indeed, but the very flower and strength of his congregation, about to leave him and set out upon a new enterprise, filled with peril. Aside from any question of personal disappointment at the decision concerning himself, it was a time of inexpressible sorrow to the heart of the faithful pastor. Bradford's words picture

<sup>1</sup> Bradford, "Of Plimoth Plantation," p. 73.

the passionate grief of the scene very plainly. That last prayer and the concluding benediction were poured out from a great, sympathetic heart, which had without question intuitively apprehended to some degree the suffering which did take place during the next winter on the bleak slopes at Plymouth. There are few places in all this story where the greatness and strength of Robinson appear more vividly than in this hour of almost sacrificial anguish, when he bade the flower of his church that last farewell at Delfshaven.

## XII

### THE SO-CALLED "FAREWELL ADDRESS"





## CHAPTER XII

### THE SO-CALLED "FAREWELL ADDRESS"

AT this point in the narrative we must take up a detailed examination of that address or sermon which Robinson is reported by Winslow to have delivered to the members of his church who were about to depart for America. This has become the best known utterance and episode in the whole life of Robinson, on account of the discussion which has gathered around the phrase "more light," which is used by Winslow in his report.

The source of our knowledge of the occasion and the words which Robinson used is in the defense which was made by Edward Winslow in behalf of the colonies against Samuel Gorton and others, in the year 1646. The mission of meeting the charges was entrusted to Winslow by the colony in view of the seriousness of the attack which had been made upon it. Two points must be kept clearly in view from the outset. The first is the date of Winslow's book. It was not published until the year 1646, and, therefore,

our knowledge of the "Farewell Address," as we will hereafter call it, comes from a source which bears a date over twenty-five years after the occasion on which it was delivered. This item of time may mean much or little, according to the reasons we may have for believing that there was any special purpose for which the Address would have been remembered or preserved. The second point is this: Winslow's book is apologetic in its purpose. It is designed to meet serious charges with sufficient arguments. It is not a set of annals or a history to which we must go for our knowledge of the Address, but an apologetic treatise in the interests of Separatists<sup>1</sup> in which the author, under a special commission, replies to objections against New England which prevailed in the mother country. There were several of these, among which was this:

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<sup>1</sup> The full title of this book is interesting enough to warrant its reprint here. It is: HYPOCRISIE VNMASKED: By A True Relation of the Proceedings of the Governour and Company of the Massachusetts against Samvel Gorton, (and his Accomplices), a notorious disturber of the Peace and quiet of the severall Governments wherein he lived: With the grounds and reasons thereof, examined and allowed by their Generall Court holden at Boston in New England, in November last, 1646. Together with a particular Answer to the manifold slanders and abominable falsehoods which are contained in a Book written by the said Gorton, and entitled *Simplicities Defence against Seven-headed Policy*, &c. Discovering to the view of all whose eyes are open, his manifold Blasphemies; as also the dangerous agreement which he and his Accomplices made with ambitious and treacherous Indians, who at the same time were deeply engaged in a desperate Conspiracy to cut off all the rest of the English in

"because (say they) the Church of Plymouth, which went first from Leyden, were schismatics, Brownists, rigid Separatists, &c., having Mr. Robinson for their pastor who made and to the last professed separation from other the churches of Christ, &c. And the rest of the Churches in New England, holding communion with that church, are to be reputed such as they are."

Against this common false statement, Winslow advanced four counter arguments. These were: 1. Robinson's daily teaching in his ministry, under which Winslow lived in Leyden from 1617 to 1620, which always was against separation from any of the Reformed churches. 2. The "Apology," published in English and Latin, and easy to be had in either language at that time (1646). 3. The common practice of the Leyden church in allowing communion with the Reformed churches, many instances of which Winslow gives. 4. And, finally, the "wholesome counsel" that

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the other Plantations. Whereunto is added a Briefe Narration (occasioned by certain aspersions) of the true grounds or cause of the first Planting of New England; the Precedent of their Churches in the way and worship of God; their Communion with the Reformed Churches; and their practise towards those that dissent from them in matters of Religion and Church Government. By EDWARD WINSLOW. Psalm cxx. 3, 4. "What shall be given unto thee, or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper." Published by Authority. LONDON. Printed by *Rich. Cotes* for *John Bellamy* at the Three Golden Lions in Cornhill, neare the Royall Exchange. 1646.

Robinson gave to the exiles previous to their departure, which was proof positive that the charge was false.

The "wholesome counsel" is quoted as follows.

"In the next place, for the wholesome counsell Mr. *Robinson* gave that part of the Church whereof he was Pastor, at their departure from him to begin the great worke of Plantation in *New England*, amongst other wholesome Instructions and Exhortations, hee used these expressions, or to the same purpose; We are now ere long to part asunder, and the Lord knoweth whether ever he should live to see our faces again; but whether the Lord had appointed it or not, he charged us before God and his blessed Angels, to follow him no further than he followed Christ. And if God should reveal anything to us by any other instrument of his, to be as ready to receive it, as ever we were to receive any truth by his Ministry: For he was very confident the Lord had more truth and light yet to breake forth out of his holy Word. He took occasion also miserably to bewaile the state and condition of the Reformed churches, who were come to a period in Religion, and would goe no further than the instruments of their Reformation: As for example, the Lutherans they could not be drawne to goe beyond what Luther saw, for whatever part of God's will he had further imparted and revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it. And so also, saith he, you see the Calvinists, they stick where he left them;

A misery much to bee lamented; For though they were precious shining lights in their time, yet God had not revealed his whole will to them: And were they now living, saith hee, they would bee as ready and willing to embrace further light, as that they had received. Here also he put us in mind of our Church-Covenant (at least that part of it) whereby wee promise and covenant with God and one with another, to receive whatsoever light or truth shall be made known to us from his written Word: but withall exhorted us to take heed what we received for truth, before we received it. For, saith he, *It is not possible the Christian world should come so lately out of such thick Anti-christian darknesse, and that full perfection of knowledge should breake forth at once.*"<sup>1</sup>

This is the original and the only source of our knowledge of the words of Robinson which compose the Farewell Address. All other reports go back to this,<sup>2</sup> and the discussion of the trustworthiness of our knowledge of the Address is concerned solely with Winslow's report.

As to the time when the Farewell Address was delivered, we cannot determine precisely. There were several fasts held by the church in connection with the emigration. One was at the time when

<sup>1</sup> See Young's "Chronicles," 1841, p. 396. Quoted in Dexter "Congregationalism as Seen," p. 404.

<sup>2</sup> Mather, "Magnalia," 1: 14. Neal, "History of N. E.," 1: 77. Belknap, "American Biography," 2: 172.

the final decision was made concerning the number who were to go. It may have been then that Robinson preached a sermon from the text, "And David's men said vnto him, See, we be afrayed here in Judah, how much more if we come to Keilah against the hoste of the Philistims? Then David asked counsell of the Lorde againe. And the Lorde answered him, and saide, Arise, go downe to Keilah: for I wil deliuer the Philistims into thine hand." (1 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4. Genevan Version.)

It seems less probable, however, that the Address belongs here than that it was a part of some later sermon. The words "we are now ere long to part asunder," would seem to indicate an event near the embarkation, either the farewell feast at Robinson's house in Leyden, or the leave-taking at Delfshaven before the embarkation of those who were to sail for America. The more probable of these two occasions is the former, since the final meeting at Delfshaven seems to have been a short one, and chiefly occupied by Robinson's prayer. Therefore this wholesome counsel may have been a part of the sermon which Robinson preached from the text, "And there at the Riuer, by Ahaua, I proclaymed a fast, that we might humble ourselues before our God, and seeke of him a ryght way for

vs, and for our children, and for all our substance." (Ezra 8:21. Genevan Version.)

There seems to have been no doubt entertained concerning the reliable character of Winslow's report until George Sumner published a note on the matter at the close of his "Memoirs of the Pilgrims at Leyden."<sup>1</sup> Sumner did not deem the evidence sufficient to warrant him in branding Winslow's report as false; but the whole report seemed to him somewhat open to question. For Winslow, he pointed out, gives the report freely, after a lapse of twenty-five or twenty-six years, and there is no other report of the discourse to be found anywhere. The pages of Bradford, contemporary controversy, and the records of the Leyden-Plymouth church are alike silent in the matter. Winslow does not say whether his report of the wholesome counsel is from notes, or whether he is simply recording a memory.

But there is no special reason why this discourse should have been copied into the church records or accurately reported from notes, unless there was something startling or peculiar in it. It requires no special feat of memory for a man who had been for three years a listener to a person's preaching, to give a reliable report, even after

<sup>1</sup> See "Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll.," Series 3, Vol. ix, pp. 70, 71.

twenty-six years, of an address which was significant at the time only because it emphasized with unusual clearness something which had been all the while central and explicit in the preacher's thought and practice.

Hence we are driven back to the matter of internal evidence. And here we find that there is nothing novel in the subject matter of the report which Winslow gives. There are parallels to every statement of the Farewell Address in the writings of Robinson. One who never had read the sources might be surprised at Winslow's report, but one who knows Robinson intimately is not. Here is no foreign note; here is no surprise. The Farewell Address is precisely what we should expect to find. The fact that it appears in a report, informally given a quarter of a century after the event, does not awaken suspicion as to its genuineness in the mind of one who has read thoroughly the preserved writings of Robinson. We are confident that Robinson is correctly reported for substance of doctrine by Winslow.

The central point in the whole Address is the matter of "more light," which Robinson felt sure was yet to break forth from the Bible. To what did he refer? This brings us to the interpretation of the Farewell Address, and we must begin at



once by taking up the most significant one ever attempted. This was by Dr. Henry Martyn Dexter.<sup>1</sup> His purpose was polemic. This is perfectly evident from the way in which he implies an antagonist throughout his discussion. He says, Robinson "has been persistently put wrong by those who, never having much studied his writings and unfamiliar with the real judgment, doctrine and spirit of the man, have interpreted him too much in the light of their own temper and times, and too little in that of those which were actual with him." And "it is impossible that he should have spoken to the Plymouth men in the sense in which he has been commonly reputed to have spoken. Nothing short of insanity could have made *him* teach after the fashion of the self-styled 'advanced thinkers' of to-day."

Dr. Dexter seeks to show that there was in Robinson "a habit of mind irreconcilably at variance with the fundamental principles of modern rationalism." He also speaks of "that high pedestal whereon the late generations—and more especially the heterodox among them—have delighted to exalt him as the apostle of a thought so progressive as to be quite out of sight of his own time, and the prophet of a liberalism having unlimited capacity to 'embrace further light.' "

<sup>1</sup> "Congregationalism as Seen," pp. 400-410.

From these quotations it will be seen at once that Dr. Dexter's purpose in his critical examination of the Farewell Address is to meet the claim made by the Unitarian and liberal theologians of the past century, that Robinson was an early prophet of their temper and progress in matters of doctrine. This was a claim which a man of Dr. Dexter's temper would not brook without protest, and this protest takes shape in the interpretation of the Address which we will now proceed to examine.

The interpretation itself has met both favor and discredit. Dr. Dexter was a scholar of such large resource that he carried great weight in such an argument as he here presents. That argument has been welcomed by some who are distressed to hear Robinson claimed by so-called "liberals"; by others, and now probably by the large majority, irrespective of class or label, the interpretation has been rejected. But we do not know where Dr. Dexter's interpretation has itself been subjected to a critical examination. And this must be done before it is possible to maintain any ground.

Let us go over Dr. Dexter's argument.

His first attempt is to show that John Robinson was a defender of the creed of the Synod of Dort, both as regards the general theological posi-

tions maintained by that great creed, and also as regards "that animus of infallibility and in-exposure to essential future modification in which it held them" [i. e. those positions]. Here we must keep two points in mind. The first is the body of doctrine itself; the second is its "animus of infallibility."

That Robinson was in hearty agreement with the doctrine, his "Defence" bears abundant witness. It is a whole-hearted championship of the articles. But that he anywhere sanctioned the "animus of infallibility," or that he recognized such an "animus" to exist is utterly without warrant from any statement contained in the treatise just mentioned.

Dr. Dexter does not seek to prove his point from the "Defence," but turns to Robinson's "Essays" in order to display there the signs of a habit of mind which would lead us to feel sure that Robinson never held the possibility of progress in doctrine, although he might grant such a possibility in respect to polity.

Just here we must make one clear distinction and insist that it be held. There is a difference between the final and complete authority of the Scriptures *per se*, and the perfect and unchangeable authority of human comprehension of the

Scriptures. That difference was recognized by John Robinson. When we assert it, we are not putting into his mind a modern distinction of which he was ignorant. We find it on page after page of his writings.

Dr. Dexter is quite right in bringing the quotations which he does from the "Essays" to show that Robinson believed that the Scriptures "*carry their authoritie in their mouthes.*" Robinson most surely holds that "*Divine Authoritie* is to sway with us above all *Reason*: yea *Reason* teacheth that God is both to be beleaved and obeyed in the things for which man can see no *Reason.*"

But no quotation brought by Dr. Dexter touches the question as to whether there might not be a legitimate place for reason in the search for authority, or whether there might not be a progressive and enlarging grasp of divine truth itself. The fact that nothing of the sort is advanced by Dr. Dexter compels us to go to Robinson's writings to see if such quotations may not be found. And we do not need to seek far. In the very essay, "Of Authority and Reason," from which Dr. Dexter quotes to justify his contention, we find this explicit statement by Robinson:<sup>1</sup>

"The custom of the Church is but the custom

<sup>1</sup> "Essays" in Works, 1: 56.

of men: the sentence of the fathers but the opinion of men: the determination of councils but the judgments of men, what men soever. And so, if all men in the world, not immediately directed, as were extraordinary prophets, and apostles, in whom the Spirit spake and testified by them, should consent in one, as they, notwithstanding their multitude, were but men, though many, so was their testimony but human, though of many men; neither could it challenge any other than human assent unto it; and not that neither [i. e. either] absolutely, either in matters of discourse of reason, wherein it is possible that men should deceive themselves; or of relation from others, by whom they may be deceived. We are therefore to beware that we neither wrong ourselves by credulity, nor others by unjust suspicion."

This would surely seem to settle once for all Robinson's acceptance of "the animus of infallibility" which went with the decrees of the Dort Council. But let us supplement this by another quotation. In his "Justification of Separation," he says:

"But on the other side [that is, instead of giving great weight to the opinions of other men in every matter] for a man so far to suffer his thoughts to be conjured into the circle of any mortal man or men's judgment, as either to fear to try what is offered to the contrary, in the balance of the sanctuary, or finding it to bear weight, to fear to give

sentence on the Lord's side, yea though it be against the mighty, this is to honour men above God, and to advance a throne above the throne of Christ, who is Lord and King forever. And to speak that in this case, which by doleful experience I myself have found, many of the most forward professors in the Kingdom are well nigh as superstitiously addicted to the determinations of their guides and teachers, as the ignorant papists unto theirs, accounting it not only needless curiosity, but even intolerable arrogancy, to call into question the things received from them by tradition."<sup>1</sup>

Before making a deduction from these quotations, it will be well to recall the fact that Robinson himself bears witness to the bondage in which he was held for a long time to the opinions of men more learned than himself. His utterances just quoted grew out of his own experience.

From the above it cannot fail to be obvious that, while Robinson insisted upon the Scripture as the final authority in all matters of both doctrine and polity, he did not hold that the decrees of any council were infallible. Nor do we find that there is the least warrant for Dr. Dexter's preliminary proposition that the "ethical and theological position of Mr. Robinson's mind" rendered it incapable of receiving "more light" in matters of doctrine.

<sup>1</sup> Works, 2: 52.

Instead of this, the presumption would seem to be sufficiently clear that the heart and mind of Robinson were open to all light from all sources shed from or upon the final authority, the Word of God.

When Dr. Dexter passes to the specific argument drawn from the purpose which the Farewell Address serves in Winslow's "Hypocrisie Unmasked," there can be no question of the fact that he establishes his contention. It is in an argument concerning the polity and not concerning the doctrine of the Leyden church that Winslow introduces his report of the Address. Dr. Dexter argues with his usual command of convincing logic, and the point is well taken. But suppose it is made. And suppose we grant the force of an argument, from the specific setting of the Address as it is reported to us, which "makes polity and not dogma the key-note of this still noble farewell." Have we thereby proved that our presumptions are quite unwarranted by the facts, and that Robinson was a man unable to see farther in matters of doctrine, however liberal he might have been in matters of polity? Not in the least. We cannot reach such a conclusion until we look at the place in his whole teaching which this idea of "more light" occupied.

We must observe that the idea is not peculiar to Robinson among the Separatists, although in him it reaches its most frequent use and best illustration. Bradford says that "the light of ye word of God" was the means by which the zealous converts to the preaching of the faithful Puritan pastors were led to their final position as Separatists.

The same idea lay embedded in the very center of the first simple covenants by virtue of which the Separatists came into organic union as churches. The covenant was supremely important with them. They did not insist upon any tests of creed. They were able to take doctrinal soundness for granted on the part of all those who sought their fellowship. The covenant was made the instrument by which they united. Its terms were perfectly clear. As the Lord's free people they joined themselves by a covenant with the Lord into a church of gospel fellowship, pledging themselves to walk in all God's ways, made known or to be made known unto them.<sup>1</sup> The covenant of Henry Jacob's church, organized in 1616 in London, which probably represents Robinson's teaching with complete fidelity, was "to walk together in all God's ways and ordinances, according as he had already revealed, or

<sup>1</sup>Bradford, "Of Plimoth Plantation," p. 13.



should further make them known to them."<sup>1</sup> It is a pretty large assumption to claim that all these expressions of the possibility of more knowledge of divine truth to come in the future can apply only to matters of church order. In the words of the Farewell Address Robinson is simply recalling his hearers to the terms and to the anticipations of their own sacred covenants. It is exactly the sort of counsel that we expect from a pastor to a people united in such covenants as those just referred to.

We turn now to certain definite statements from Robinson's own writings for a closer view of his general teaching.

In his first controversy with Hall, he says:

"We do freely, and with all thankfulness, acknowledge every good thing she [the Church of England] hath, and which ourselves have there received. . . . But what then? Should we still have continued in sin, that grace might have abounded? If God have caused a further truth, like a light in a dark place, to shine in our hearts, should we still have mingled that light with darkness, contrary to the Lord's own practice (Gen. i. 4) and express precept (2 Cor. vi. 14)?" <sup>2</sup>

In the controversy with Bernard, Robinson

<sup>1</sup> Walker, "Creeds and Platforms," p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Works, 3: 407.

tells how he studied the arguments for the Separation as based upon the Scriptures, "and by searching found much light of truth." He did not follow it immediately, however, because his respect for the opinions of men whom he deemed wiser than himself was so great that he almost "suffered the light of God to have been put out . . . by other men's darkness."<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to confine this illumination to doctrine as over against polity. Indeed, there was no such distinction possible in the mind of Robinson. We make the distinction between creed and polity very easily. John Robinson did not make that distinction. To him polity was a part of doctrine; the order of the true church was an object of faith. Polity was not something of incidental value; it was essential to the body of true Christian doctrine. God had revealed in his Testament a form for the Church, which was an essential part of the whole revelation of salvation. We have no right to make a distinction for Robinson which he never would have made for himself.

Let us turn to a later controversy, represented by his book "Of Religious Communion." In it he says:

"I profess myself always one of them, who still

<sup>1</sup> Works, 2: 52.

desire to learn further, or better, what the good will of God is. And I beseech the Lord from mine heart, that there may be in the men (towards whom I desire in all things lawful to enlarge myself) the like readiness of mind to forsake every evil way, and faithfully to embrace and walk in the truth they do, or may see, as by the mercy of God, there is in me; which as I trust it shall be mine, so do I wish it may be their comfort also in the day of the Lord Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

We will take only one more illustration. This is from the last years of his life on earth:

“ We ought to be firmly persuaded in our hearts of the truth, and goodness of the religion which we profess in all things; yet as knowing ourselves to be men, whose property it is to err and to be deceived in many things; and accordingly both to converse with men in that modesty of mind, as always to desire to learn something better, or further, by them, if it may be; as also to beg at God’s hands the pardon of our errors (Psa. xix. 12) and aberrations, which may be, and are secret in us, and we not aware thereof.”<sup>2</sup>

Now, in the light of these expressions, we are bound to interpret the Farewell Address. Without question Robinson’s great concern always was with polity rather than with dogma. But to conclude that *therefore* he was a man with a

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 103.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 1: 39.

mind not open toward the truth as to theological doctrine is a wholly unwarranted position. We must consent to regard him as possessing a mind of more consistency than that. The man who said, "Whatsoever truth is in the world, it is from God, by what hand soever it be reached unto us" was not a lover of light in church polity and a sympathizer with the "animus of infallibility" in doctrine. Dr. Dexter's interpretation of the Farewell Address is inadequate. Winslow used the Address for an apologetic purpose, and its meaning was undoubtedly limited for that occasion to that purpose. Dr. Dexter, provoked by a too hasty appropriation of Robinson by the liberals, has interpreted the Farewell Address in a case of special pleading for a polemic purpose.

Neither Dr. Dexter nor Governor Winslow has set the Farewell into the body of Robinson's larger teaching. This we have endeavored to do. And we have found that "more light" does represent the whole man, John Robinson. What position he would have held in doctrinal matters had he lived in another age we do not know. It would be folly to guess. But the temper of the great Congregationalist was that of a seeker after the light of truth in every department of its revelation. The tendency of his age directed his growth

in the practical rather than the dogmatic line. But he was preeminently and consistently a man of open, hospitable spirit to all truth by whatever hand reached to him or through whatever light revealed.

This always has been the conviction of the hearts of Congregationalists. Dr. Dexter's interpretation was maintained with all the power of his masterful mind, and it swayed the head by its logic against what the heart felt to be true. This examination of the matter warrants the expectation that the head and heart may consent in a judgment which restores Robinson to his rightful place in the history of the Congregational churches.



XIII  
THE ESSAYS





## CHAPTER XIII

### THE ESSAYS

It would be impossible to form a correct impression of John Robinson's personality from a study of his practical enterprises, his controversies and his friendships alone. There is another source from which it is a pleasant task to draw. In 1625 there were published two editions of a volume entitled, "Observations Divine and Moral, Collected out of the Holy Scriptures, Ancient and Modern Writers, both divine and human; as also out of the Great Volume of Men's Manners: tending to the Furtherance of Knowledge and Virtue. By John Robinson." The same book was afterward published, under different titles, in 1628, 1638, 1642 and 1654. The last edition did not bear Robinson's name, but was put forth as "by a Student in Theologie." The edition used in Robinson's collected works is that of 1628. It occupies pages 1 to 259 in the first volume, from which the citations in this chapter will be made. The title here is "New Essays, or Observations," etc. The work is best known as the "Essays." They repre-

sent the ripe results of Robinson's careful observations, summed up and reasoned upon during the last years of his life in Leyden. They are, therefore, the result of his mature thought in the very prime of his life. And, if we are to judge from the number of editions put out, this is altogether his most significant book in regard to its literary value. It can hardly be classed with his other writings. It is wholly different in purpose. It reveals its author in a new light.

In the preface to the volume, Robinson gives us a clear view of that which he regarded as the sources of human knowledge. First of all came the Holy Scriptures; next, the great literature of all ages and the utterances of the great men of the time, which Robinson had read or heard and then "stored up as a precious treasure," not only for his own good but also for the good of others; and, finally, he studied the "great volume of men's manners," a wide acquaintance with which he felt that he had enjoyed during the days of his pilgrimage.

"Now this kind of study and meditation," he says, "hath been unto me full sweet and delightful, and that wherein I have often refreshed my soul and spirit, amidst many sad and sorrowful thoughts, unto which God hath called me."

The little preface to the volume thus gives us a view of Robinson's mind and temper which we do not obtain from the sterner and narrower method which he employed in his controversial writings. Here we see a really catholic mind laying hold of all the spiritual riches of literature and life, pondering them for his own joy and profit, and finally bringing out the results of his reflection set in order in these "Observations." We will taste his fruit here and there.

The contents of the volume show at once that Robinson has a method in the arrangement of his matter. He starts with "Man's knowledge of God," follows through the great attributes of God, to the religious life in its graces and activities; then he takes up the complex subject of human living and treats it all from the standpoint of religion, examining such commonplace matters as "Discretion," "The Use and Abuse of Things," "Labour," "Society," "Friendship," "Health," "Zeal" and "Marriage." The whole is concluded with an essay on "Death."

The fact that Robinson approaches his themes from the standpoint of religion does not mean that these essays are sections of sermons. Religion, we shall find, is the great fact about John Robinson and the key to the understanding of

his character. It is true here. He surveys life from the standpoint of its religious significance. The "Essays" are filled with keen observation, great practical insight, a true discrimination of values, and, with it all, a breadth, kindliness and earnestness of temper which must make every reader of this old book cherish a feeling of genuine admiration and real love for the man who wrote it.

Let us take a look into the seventh essay, "Of Religion, and Differences and Disputations Thereabout." John Robinson certainly had looked into "the great volume of men's manners" and into their lack of manners concerning this theme.

Religion, which is natural to man, Robinson says, assumes its highest form of truth in the Christian system, which is given by supernatural revelation. In this, God has disclosed not only his nature, as a worthy object of worship, but also the manner in which that worship is to be carried on.

This is an evidence of Robinson's principles of Separation, manifested at the very outset of his essay. There is a constant recurrence of this fact even in these papers. The writer is a Separatist. In the application of the principles which he held so dear, he allowed the largest play for the individual. He did not think that any cere-

mony or ritual was of divine authority, although God has prescribed the manner of worship as well as commanded its exercise. For the performance of worship "the general rules of the Word, with common-sense and discretion are sufficient."

The standard by which a man's religion is to be estimated is not his connection with any church. "A man hath, in truth, so much religion, as he hath between the Lord and himself in secret, and no more, what shows soever he makes before men."<sup>1</sup>

Robinson's demands from the religious man are intensely practical. He put the case in this way:

"There are also religious hypocrites not a few, who, because of a certain zeal which they have for and in the duties of the first table, repute themselves highly in God's favour, though they be far from that innocency towards men, specially from that goodness and love indeed, which the Lord hath inseparably joined with a true religious disposition. Such persons vainly imagine God to be like unto the most great men, who, if their followers be obsequious to them in their persons, and zealous for them in the things, which more immediately concern their [the great men's] honours and profits, do highly esteem of them; though their dealings with others, specially meaner

<sup>1</sup> Page 33.

men, be far from honest or good. But God is not partial as men are; nor regards that church and chamber religion towards him, which is not accompanied, in the house and streets, with loving-kindness and mercy and all goodness towards men.”<sup>1</sup>

This description of the false conception of God which leads a formalist to think that he can cheat him is only one of hundreds of similar homely illustrations of which the “Essays” are full. We cannot be wrong in concluding that the preacher who could use these plain illustrations would have power over a congregation made up of such men as composed the Leyden church. He speaks in this same essay of men who put on religion as they would put on their clothes, simply because to be destitute of a religion is regarded in some places as shameful. And thus with plain illustrations from common life Robinson always enforces his points.

With another shrewd observation Robinson now turns to the matter of religious partisanship. When a man embraces a religion he generally sets himself very earnestly to advocate and advance the special type of faith which he has embraced; and he often seeks also to combat all

<sup>1</sup> Page 34.

A  
RELATION  
OF THE STATE OF

*Religion: and with what Hopes and*

*Pollicies it hath beene framed, and is maintai-*

*ned in the severall states of these westerne*

*parts of the world.*

*Jo.*

*Robt. E. J.*



*Jo.*

*Robt. E. J.*

LONDON,

Printed for *Simon Waterston* dwelling in *Paules Churchyard* at the

signe of the Crowne.

1605





other forms than his own, "though oft without competent knowledge of one or other." Hence arises the tendency to partisanship and religious contention.

Robinson does not wholly deplore this. The essentially conservative temper of the man appears in this statement:

"Notwithstanding, we owe this honor to the particular courses of religion which we have once embraced, or wherein we have been brought up and received any good, that we leave it not lightly; nor further in any particular, than we needs must; nor at all in the things which God in it, in true and distinct consideration, hath blessed to our spiritual good. To be lightly moved in religion is childish weakness; but to be stiff without reason, manly obstinacy; and better to be a child in weakness, than a man in perverse obstinateness."<sup>1</sup>

This passage lets us see at a glance how deep must have been the convictions of Robinson before he was induced to go out of the Church of England. His temper is truly conservative. But his conservatism is that of the child who loves its mother's arms and cleaves to her because it loves.

Robinson's counsels in cases of religious controversy are consistent with the methods which we have found him using in all his discussions "Disputations in religion are sometimes neces-

<sup>1</sup> Page 36.

sary but always dangerous; drawing the best spirits into the head from the heart, and leaving it empty of all, or too full of fleshly zeal and passion, if extraordinary care be not taken still to supply and fill it anew with pious affections towards God and loving towards men."

And so he urges that all who are compelled to engage in religious controversy remember how serious the contest is and how fearful the cost of an error; that they never make out the cause of an opponent to be worse than it really is; that they never give a sinister interpretation to his motives; that they be honest and preserve the approval of a good conscience in their debates.

This gives us a glimpse of a man who was farthest removed from the narrow ranges of religious partisanship. And we understand why Robinson's own work has so much of rugged honesty, kindly tolerance, and winning frankness in it.

In this essay there is a bit of local color which shows us how aptly Robinson was able to choose an illustration. His own experience had been pretty closely concerned with the Merchant Adventurers, and his people understood all too well how willing any man was to risk nothing in the prospect of gaining very much. We can see the telling force as well as the merry jest, therefore,

in a turn like this: Religious disputes are undertaken by many who are not the least prepared for them, either because they think it is a shame for them not to show others how much knowledge and zeal they have in religion, or else "because they make account in truth that they venture nothing but words in the voyage, and so can have no great loss." It is not difficult to see the aptness and force of this illustration to the men who had been wrestling with the practical problems of the emigration to America and the Merchant Adventurers. In the following paragraph, also, Robinson uses an illustration which could not fail to be appreciated by his people:

"I have known divers that have more lightly and licentiously changed their religion, and that in no small points, than a sober man would do the fashion of his coat; and who, in my conscience, if it might but have gained or saved them twelve pence, would have held their former religion still."<sup>1</sup>

One of the most frequent criticisms of the Puritans, and of the colonists in Massachusetts, is that, however much they may have been zealous for religious toleration in England, when they were themselves masters they became equally intolerant of those who differed from them. One

<sup>1</sup> Page 38.

of the most interesting paragraphs in the essay that we are now handling is concerned with this very point:

“Men are for the most part minded for or against toleration of diversity of religions, according to the conformity which they themselves hold, or hold not, with the country or kingdom where they live. Protestants living in the countries of Papists commonly plead for toleration of religion; so do Papists that live where Protestants bear sway: though few of either, specially of the clergy, as they are called, would have the other tolerated, where the world goes on their side. . . . For conclusion of this matter . . . as there is no church-state and profession so truly Christian and good, in which too many may not be found carried in their persons with a spirit plainly antichristian: so there is hardly any sect so antichristian or evil otherwise in church profession, in which there are not divers, truly though weakly led, with the Spirit of Christ in their persons, and so true members of his mystical body. With whom to deal rigorously for some few aberrations of ignorance or infirmity, were more to please Christ’s enemy than Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

Back to such teaching as this for its sanction must be carried that fairer and friendlier attitude of the Plymouth Colony toward contrary opinion and practice in religious matters which distin-

<sup>1</sup> Page 42.

guished them from other sections of Massachusetts. This spirit had been infused among them by Robinson, and they could not forget it in the years after his death.

We have dwelt longest upon this essay because it illuminates so clearly the religious temper of its writer. But this is only one of the many sources from which clear light is thrown upon his personality. The little essay, "Of the Use and Abuse of Things," is of great value for its thinly-veiled content of autobiography. Our conception of Robinson as an austere man would be a natural inference, no doubt, if we were to judge him by his controversial or theological works alone. But he believed that all God's gifts were to be used.

"'God,' saith the wise man, 'hath made everything beautiful in his time': and indeed everything is good for something: I mean everything that God has made." "A man hath that most and best whereof he hath the lawful use. And hereupon a follower of a great lord was wont to say that he had, in effect, as much as his lord, though he were owner of little or nothing, considering how he had the use of his [lord's] gardens and galleries to walk in; heard his music with as many ears as he did; hunted with him in his parks, and ate and drank of the same that he did, though a little after him; and so for the most other delights which his lord enjoyed."

But some things are specially liable to abuse.

"And good things are abused commonly either when they are unmeasurably used . . . or by applying them unaptly." "Neither doth the abuse of good things so take away or make forfeiture of the use as that the counsel of Lycurgus is to be followed, who would have the vines cut down because men were sometimes drunken with the grapes. Yet may the abuse of a thing be so common and notorious, and the use so small or needless, as better want the small use than be in continual danger of the great abuse of it."<sup>1</sup>

This particular essay furnishes the soundest philosophy for the entire matter of temperance in the use of everything that ministers to physical pleasure. Robinson shows how the best things in the world become the very worst when they are perverted in their right use, and are therefore to be used with the greatest caution; "otherwise we shall be liable to the curse of a greater than Aristippus, who wished a plague upon those wantons who, by abusing it, had defamed a certain sweet ointment wherein he took delight." "All evil stands in the abuse of the good," Robinson believed. The greatest abuse to which things are subjected is in their intemperate use, "as it is said of wine, that the first cup quenches thirst,

<sup>1</sup> Page 121.

the second produces cheerfulness, the third, drunkenness, and the fourth, madness." The best things in the world "we must not therefore superstitiously disavow, or cease to account the best, as they are; but we must thereby be warned to use them the more warily, that we may enjoy their full goodness and not prejudice them by abuse."

It is quite common to regard the Puritan as a person who relegated all the brightest and most cheerful influences in his environment to the class of things forbidden. The austerity, renunciation and limited enjoyments of these men have been defined as their most pronounced characteristics. Here, however, are breadth and joyousness of view and deep insight into the true meaning of life, which forbid classifying their author with the Puritan as he is commonly considered. The *Essays* lead us a step farther than this. They serve to correct the popular idea of the Puritan. Robinson was not a startling exception among the Puritans and the Separatists. These were men of broader sympathies and happier temper than they are generally regarded. Robinson's *Essays* set him securely among the men of good cheer, intense humanity, keen appreciation of the good things of this earthly life; he is modern to the core and also Puritan to the core. It is a libel to

brand Puritanism as gloomy and cold. The essays of John Robinson repudiate that notion.

Robinson drew his observations from two sources. The first and deepest of these is divine. God, who has spoken through the sacred Scriptures, is the source of all wisdom, and commands men to lay their ear close to his mouth that they may hear him speak. The second source of wisdom is man himself. And neither source is perfect without the other, although the knowledge of God must be accorded first place in order of importance. A man who claims to be a servant of God but does not know him is like a man who pretends to be the servant of some nobleman whom he never has seen, or within whose gates he never has entered.

Robinson's thinking began and rounded itself out in the great fact of God. He did not try to define God. He realized that the infinite never could be comprehended by man, even if there were any medium through which it could be revealed. To Robinson, God was utterly past finding out, and he was dazzled by the infinite splendor more than the eye is dazzled when it attempts to gaze upon the sun at midday. But, although he could not, by searching, find God out, he found it quite possible and his happy privilege to let his



soul loose in the unspeakable glory, and there, without another mood to spoil its rapture, it arose and sang. His heart was ravished with love of the Majesty divine, especially as he sought and found it unveiled in Jesus Christ. The fulness of everlasting joy he expected to find in the infinite Father and his fellowship.

So Robinson's heart glowed with a joy in the sense of God's being and love and fatherly care, which makes him one with all mystic lovers of the invisible Father. The same spiritual passion burns in the heart of the Separatist as leaped into flame in the breast of St. Francis when he stretched out his hands toward the ineffable glory of the seraph to receive the impress of the stigmata. The Christian world, however sadly rent with schism, is yet one in the impulse of its devotion and the passion of its love.

There is something deeply beautiful in the glimpse which we get into the heart of Robinson through his essay, "Of God's Love." He is like Paul in his spiritual exultation. He fairly shouts it forth. "He whom God loves, though he know it not, is a happy man: he that knows it knows himself to be happy." Robinson repeats the experience of Paul from the record in the eighth chapter of the letter to the Romans:

and we see the Leyden pastor and the great apostle to the Gentiles sharing the same rich experience. Nothing—nor death, nor principalities, nor powers—could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Not even the fearfulness of sin clouded this splendid experience.

Robinson makes God's severity with sin the inevitable outcome of divine love. For God must love that which is good; and that which is the highest good is God himself; therefore God must love himself supremely, and then all good things to which he has communicated his own goodness. Anything, therefore, which violates his holiness must come under his severest censure, because it is an offense against the love which he has for goodness. Although he loves all the works of his hand, when man, by his sin, offends that infinite love of the good, it is necessary that man should become miserable rather than that God should forget his own honor and glory.

Robinson does not dwell in this realm of sterner reflection long. He comes back quickly to the gracious love of which he is as sure as he is certain of the sun, although he does not climb into the heavens to see it shine. The greatest witness of the love of God to men is the fact that he does turn them from sin unto himself. Into this essay

one might insert, without doing violence to its lofty tone, the words of Whittier, from his poem, "The Eternal Goodness":

"And so beside the Silent Sea  
I wait the muffled oar;  
No harm from Him can come to me  
On ocean or on shore.

"I know not where His islands lift  
Their fronded palms in air;  
I only know I cannot drift  
Beyond His love and care."

The simplicity of Robinson's trust in God is evident from the manner in which he regards dependence upon the divine promises. We have a short essay, "Of God's Promises," in which he defines his relation to the promises of the Father. Here, as in many another place in his writings, Robinson lets a sentence escape him which reveals to us the stress of exile and poverty in which he was obliged to spend his days. The Lord, he says, "provides very graciously for his poor servants, who are oftentimes brought into that distressed state both outward and inward as they have very little else save the promises of God wherewith to comfort themselves." But these promises Robinson tested and found true, even in the respect to material things.

“I must therefore thus conclude with myself touching those matters—seeing ‘God hath promised all good things to them that love him’ (Psa. xxxiv: 9): if this or that bodily good thing, good in itself, be indeed for my good, I shall receive it from him in due time: and if I receive it not, it is a real testimony from him that indeed it is not good for me, how much soever I desire it ”

This reverent trust in the goodness of God marks Robinson as one of those “literal Christians,” who dare to follow their Master even into the ranges of a perfect filial confidence. It takes a great soul to rise to the level of such practice. There are certain moods which none but a Christian can understand. When St. Paul discloses his very heart in such words as “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,” he puts himself into the class of those whom only a man of similar experience can appreciate. The experience may be made the subject of analytical investigation by others, but it cannot be understood except by a mystic. St. Francis of Assisi, “rapt in God,” is an enigma to one who has never known anything of a transport as real and divine as his. John Robinson, practical and sagacious pastor and friend, opens his heart in this little essay so deeply that we see his kinship of soul with men of the type of Paul

and Francis. To those who know the experience, he becomes a more real person by this glimpse into inner chambers.

There is hardly a more significant or interesting section of all Robinson's writings, for the light that it throws upon the character of the man, than the short essay, "Of Created Goodness;"<sup>1</sup> for it shows by sharpest contrast the speculative reasoner and the man of helpful service. Here are the two sides of Robinson's character set over against each other in a few pages, the theologian and the practical philanthropist.

Robinson cannot approach the matter of doing good, the "showing of a spring of water to him that is thirsty," or the gift of "even one loaf, yea a shive to him that is hungry,"—he cannot come to the point of giving good, practical counsel about these things except through the avenue of a speculative discussion of the relation of all human or "created" goodness to the benevolence of God. God is the source of all goodness, and everything that is done to us that is good is only a blessing of God reached to us by the hand of a brother.

But this background of divine sovereignty and the attempt to relate the beneficent action of the

<sup>1</sup> Page 17-23.

human will to it, characteristic as it is of Robinson's thought, yields very soon to a discourse on the manner in which good ought to be done, which is conducted so plainly and with such wise appreciation of the task of doing good, that we summarize and quote the points as follows:

"First, We must do things in obedience to Gods commandments, and in honour of his name and gospel; and must ever have that end in our eye, as archers have their mark.

"Secondly, That we do it at all times, as we have opportunity. . . . We must beware of that agueish goodness, which comes by fits only and when men are pleased: for so, they say, the devil is good.

"Thirdly, We must do good readily. . . . He that giveth, or doth other good, readily, giveth twice: he scarce once, or at all, that doth it slackly: he rather, in truth, suffers a good turn to be drawn from him that doeth it. Living springs send out streams of water: dead pits must have all that they afford drawn out with buckets.

"Fourthly, According to our ability; knowing, that as our receivings are from God, greater or less, so much our accounts be for doing good. . . .

"Fifthly, We must have respect to men's present wants; and not only consider what we can best spare but withal what they stand most need of. . . .

"Sixthly, We must do good to all (Gal. vi. 10), knowing, that wheresoever a man is, there is a place for a good turn: but, more specially, to some according to the singular bond, natural, civil, or religious, wherewith God hath tied us together. . . .

"Lastly, A good man, how gracious soever and ready to do good, 'guideth his affairs with discretion' (Psa. cxii. 5), not sowing his seed in barren ground, by bestowing favours without difference; for that is rather to throw away than to bestow a benefit."

The good sense and the keen insight of these counsels are at once evident. There is the conciseness of Poor Richard in them; there is the practical experience of the Christian pastor behind them; and before the essay closes, we are permitted to see the beating of that pastor's heart in a paragraph which rings true to the experiences of the Christian ministry to-day, as much as it did to the conditions of the Separatist church in Leyden during the first quarter of the seventeenth century.

"When I consider what good the rich and mighty otherwise in the world might easily do if they had hearts answerable; and how little they do for the most part; it seems horrible unthankfulness and iniquity in them, and matter of indignation against them: but then, on the other side,

when I consider how little good I myself do, in my meanness, and others my like, to that which I should, and might do, if I did my utmost; I find reason to be most angry with myself and mine own unprofitableness, and to be glad and thankful that so much good is done by the other as is."

Thus the pastor's experience makes him tender, wise and fraternal, where the struggles of the theologian served to do little more than to stir the mist without showing the way. Years later Cotton Mather, the theologian, wrote his "Essays to do Good." Benjamin Franklin, who could have had little sympathy with Mather's theology, found it in his heart to write concerning the influence of the slight volume upon him:

"If I have been, as you seem to think, a useful citizen, the public owes all the advantage of it to that book."<sup>1</sup>

We are likely to forget Mather's "Essays" and their influence upon Franklin in the emphasis which we lay upon the theological work of their writer. The parallel is not without interest. These few pages in the midst of the many filled with controversies in doctrine and polity may have found, and doubtless did find, their Franklin

<sup>1</sup> A. P. Marvin, "The Life and Times of Cotton Mather," p. 362.



somewhere. At least the pages glow to-day with counsel that is both kindly and wise.

There are indications everywhere in the *Essays* of Robinson's tendency to take large views of life and to consider all sides of a question. An instance of this catholic judgment is the rule he lays down according to which the value of a man's life and work is to be estimated. He says:

"We are not, therefore, to measure a person's state by some one or few acts, done, as it were, by the way, and upon instance of some strong temptation, but according to the tenor and course of his life. Else what wise man should not be a fool also? Or what fool should not be a wise man?"

It was not a common canon of judgment in times of intense controversy and sharp use of personal judgment; but Robinson held firmly to this principle, that no man is wholly good and no man wholly bad, so far as his actions make it possible to judge of his character. We must not forget this fact whenever we consider the severities of Robinson's doctrine of original sin and the bondage of the spirit to evil.

In the essay "*Of Equability, and Perseverance in Well-doing*"<sup>1</sup> Robinson pleads for the reason-

<sup>1</sup> Pages 24-31.

ableness of a judicious, conservative attitude toward all religious questions. He is a true disciple of the middle way, whenever that does not involve the sacrifice of any principle. The instance of Eli is used by Robinson to illustrate his thought as follows:

“It is dangerous in courses of religion and godliness to fall forward by errors, preposterous zeal, or other misguidance: yet not so much so as to fall backward by an unfaithful heart. The former may break his face thereby, and lose his comfort in a great measure both with God and men: but the latter is in danger utterly to break the neck of his conscience, as old Eli brake his neck bodily by falling backward from his seat and died. Are there not many Eli’s in all ages?”

The progress of the soul, Robinson taught, can be secured only by resolute struggle. The sins and the dispositions toward evil which are bound up with our constitution make it necessary for us to fight if we are to gain ground. As he puts it in homely phrase, “our way to heaven is up a hill, and we drag a cart-load of our corruptions after us; which, except we keep going, will pull us backward ere we be aware.”<sup>1</sup>

Robinson’s sense of the authority of the Scriptures was vivid and compelling. He wrote concerning them as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Page 28.

"The Scriptures are not only authentic in themselves, as having the Spirit of God for the author both of matter and manner and writing (2 Pet. i. 21); but do also, as they say, carry their authority in their mouths, binding both to credence and obedience all whomsoever unto whom they come and by what means soever."

His doctrine of inspiration, so far as he formulates it in the Essays, is not so limited as the strictest interpretation of the foregoing might lead us to believe. He says:

"Neither all things which the prophets of God wrote were written by Divine inspiration, but some of them humanly, as their human affairs, common to them with other men, required: neither was all wherein they were divinely inspired brought into the public treasury of the church or made part of the canonical Scriptures which we call the Bible; no more than all which they spake was spoken by the Spirit; or all which they spake by the Spirit written (John xx. 30, 31; xxi. 25):<sup>1</sup> but only so much as the Lord in wisdom and mercy thought requisite to guide the church in faith and obedience to the world's end; so as the Scriptures should neither be defective through brevity, nor burthensome by too great largeness and prolixity."

<sup>1</sup> "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

We find ourselves brought constantly in contact with Robinson's spiritual temper in these Essays. One of the hardships which his sensitive spirit was compelled to endure was the reproach of a schismatic from the body of true Christians which he seemed doomed to bear. This was a trial of no slight character to him. We can almost hear him appeal from the judgments of men, which were at one against him in this regard, to the just judgment of God, before whom his own soul said he stood innocent, in a paragraph from the essay "Of Heresy and Schism."<sup>1</sup>

"And if, only an uncharitable heart make an uncharitable person before God, and a proud heart, a proud person; then he, who upon due examination and certain knowledge of his heart, finds and feels the same truly disposed to union with all Christians, so far as possibly he can see it lawful; though, through error or frailty, he may step aside into some by-path, that way; yet, hath that person a *supersedeas* from the Lord in his bosom, securing him from being attached for a schismatical person and so found in the court of heaven; what blame soever he may bear from men upon earth, or correction from God, for his failing, upon infirmity, therein."

Here and there the Essays drag heavily. The


<sup>1</sup> Page 72.

subjects are commonplace at times and the treatment of them conventional and prosaic. Now and then, however, Robinson throws a tremendous dash of vitality into a theme, and it is lifted at once from the low levels of academic treatment by the touch of life. The man who has suffered and fought speaks now and then, and scarcely ever with more splendid vitality of conviction than in the essay, "Of Truth and Falsehood."<sup>1</sup> It is a champion who says:

"But our Lord Christ called himself truth, not custom: neither is falsehood, error or heresy convinced by novelty, but by truth. This truth is always the same whilst the God of truth is in heaven, what entertainment soever it find with men, upon earth: it is always praiseworthy, though no man praise it; and hath no reason, or just cause to be ashamed, though it often goes with a scratched face. They that fight against it are like the floods beating upon the strong rocks, which are so much the more miserably dashed in pieces, by how much they are the more violently carried. Though fire and sword assault it, yet will it not be killed, or die: and though by violence it be buried quick, yet will it rise again; and if not before, yet when all flesh shall rise again; and when truth, which was first, and before falsehood and error, shall be last, and abide for ever."

<sup>1</sup> Pages 72-76.

There beats through such words as these the pulse of a brave and honest man, who conceives of his life as a gift to a cause. And back of all the rugged honesty of his controversies, which we have seen everywhere in evidence, lies the principle which he formulates in these words:

“He that hath but a right philosophical spirit, and is but morally honest, would rather suffer many deaths than call a pin, a point, or speak the least thing against his understanding or persuasion.” 

This is one reason why the writings of Robinson stand so far above the mass of the surviving literature of the Separation. There is such honesty of conviction in them; such sensitiveness to the high claims of the truth abounds; such perfect willingness to repudiate old grounds when new positions become clear is here, that we are ready to give enthusiastic praise to John Robinson, the champion of the truth.

Robinson was a truth seeker before he was a truth defender. He believed in the effort of the reason to apprehend the truth. In an essay “Of Knowledge and Ignorance,” he says:

“Papists call ignorance the mother of devotion; and so make reckoning that if they, the multitude especially, be ignorant enough, they are de-

vout enough. But the philosopher, though a heathen, who thought all sin to come of ignorance, shot nearer the mark than those left-handed Christians."<sup>1</sup>

Another essay, "Of Society and Friendship," has so much of the modern social sense in it, and contains so strong a protest against the whole effort to attain holiness through isolation, that it might well come from the pen of a writer to-day. How near the courses of modern thinking this proposition runs:

"God hath made man a sociable creature; and hath not only ordained several societies, in which persons are to unite themselves for their mutual welfare; but withal so dispensed his blessings as that no man is so barren but hath something wherewith to profit others; nor any so furnished but that he stands [in] need of others to supply his wants."

Here, certainly, is a keen appreciation of the unity of the race, the mutual dependence of its members, and the necessity of society to the perfection of the individual.

In its bearing upon the Christian life, Robinson is no less clear concerning the validity of the principle:

<sup>1</sup> Page 79.

"As God hath established fellowships and communities of men to procure their mutual good, and to fence them the better, on every side, against evil; so sin and wickedness being the greatest and only absolute evil, Christians are most bound by virtue of their association, to help and assist, within the bounds of the callings in which God hath set them, their brethren and associates against it."

The duty of the Christian to serve society is therefore taught with the greatest force and clearness by Robinson, as over against any tendency to "hide in holes" from one's fellow men, "as melancholic monks do."

On every page of this essay Robinson stands revealed to us as a loyal and tender friend. He bears witness to the joy he found in the fellowship of kindred spirits:

"To him that knows the use of true friendship, no earthly thing is more delightful than the sweet society of wise and honest friends, whether for recreation after study or labor; or communication in a prosperous state; or comfort in an afflicted."

He warns against letting the fact of an abuse of confidence in a single instance lead to a permanent distrust of all men; he urges the wisdom of sharing our joys with our friends rather than always giving them a knowledge of our sorrows.



He gives us such sententious bits of truth as this:

“Wealth maketh many friends, but poverty trieth them.”

He lets us see again that temper and tendency of his own spirit which we have found impelling him toward a larger communion with his Christian brethren:

“Lastly, when we are necessarily pressed [to break rather than untwine the cord of a former friendship] let us rather do it with sorrow than anger; and withal, have in us a disposition to re-assume our old course of kindness, if there appear cause afterwards; as the storks, when the winter is over, do affect their former nests.”

Robinson lays down a rule equally tolerant and gracious in the essay, “Of Suspicion,” in which he says:

“Howsoever things fall out, it is best to keep our bias always on the right side; and to incline still to a better, rather than to a worse opinion of men than they deserve.”<sup>1</sup>

Such examples of true insight as these are scattered all through the Essays:

“It is the first duty of a man to inform his conscience aright; and then to follow the direction that it gives.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Page 181.

<sup>2</sup> Page 195.

“True zeal must be for God, and from God, and according to God: and having God both for beginning and end and rule of direction, it cannot but itself be good and godly.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us turn for a moment to another essay, of only three printed pages, on “Health and Physic.” It shows us a side of Robinson’s character that we never would surmise from the other writings which we have already examined. Here are bits of keen observation, neat turns of thought and phrase, and a merry mood blended with an earnest, serious spirit. Good health he calls “this most sweet sauce of all other goods,” and the best way to preserve it is by a temperate life, begun early and continued steadfastly. The one point at which Robinson has wondered most is the unreasonable choice of physicians which persons make when they are in need of them. The perverse tendency to consult quacks was prevalent then as now, if this observation by Robinson is true:

“For though in all other courses men seek for [the counsel of] such as are most skilful; yet in this they are not only more ready to believe any that professeth himself a physician, than of any other faculty [i. e. profession]; but also choose rather to trust their bodies and lives in the hands

<sup>1</sup> Page 205.

of ignorant empirics, men or women, than of the most expert and learned physicians that are."

Robinson proceeds to speculate upon the grounds of this observed fact, and, among other reasons to account for it, finds that the large fees charged by physicians of high standing tend to induce many to seek inexperienced quacks whose charges are less. And this gives Robinson the opportunity to offer this word of counsel to the regular physicians:

"If they would descend to that rule of equity in other cases, a pennyworth for a penny, [they] would find that, lighter gains coming thicker, would make heavier purses."

In the concluding paragraph of the essay, Robinson indulges in a piece of ancient wit at the expense of physicians, although he does not end it until he has turned, in his usually serious way, to point a moral. He says:

"Physicians, saith one, and truly, have this advantage over them of other professions, that the sun beholds their cures, and the earth covers their failings. They that die under their hands, or by their default, are past complaining of them: they that recover and survive, though sometimes by the benefit of nature alone, under God's providence, will repute and report them the means of their recovery. Which consideration makes not

the honest and conscionable the more secure, but the more careful of their account to be given to God, from whose eyes nothing is hid.”<sup>1</sup>

It is almost two hundred and fifty years since a new edition of this single volume has been put out. Even in the reprint among the author's collected works the Essays are seldom read. Perhaps it is useless to hope that they will ever claim attention. They are very vital papers, however. A few of them are as timely now as they were in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Their author was a man of wide acquaintance with classical literature; he saw clearly and deeply into life; he was the master at times of a clear and forceful style. The Essays are his most important literary work.

<sup>1</sup> Page 139.

XIV

THE LAST YEARS IN LEYDEN



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE LAST YEARS IN LEYDEN

JOHN ROBINSON turned back to Leyden from Delfshaven for a busy life of less than five years. It was a time of divided interests. He was still pastor of the church of the exiles; he was still pastor of the church of the remnant. His whole wish was to remain with those who needed him most, the aged and the weak in Leyden, until, by the gradual transfer of the Leyden majority his duty should lie in the New World and he might follow to resume it there. He deplored their lack of a preacher and said, in a letter to John Carver, that he should make this fact a spur to a reunion with them at the earliest possible moment.

The company of emigrants to America did not consist entirely of members of Robinson's congregation in Leyden. There were many who joined them in England. The Leyden pastor, however, regarded himself as the pastor of the entire company, for he sent them a letter in that capacity which was read to them before they sailed from Southampton. Bradford thought that the letter

was sufficiently important to warrant its insertion in his story, "Of Plimoth Plantation."<sup>1</sup> The letter shows how much Robinson longed to be with the exiles in their undertaking. . He says:

"Loving Christian Friends, I do heartily and in the Lord salute you all, as being they with whom I am present in my best affection, and most earnest longings after you, though I be constrained for a while to be bodily absent from you. I say constrained God knowing how willingly, and much rather than otherwise, I would have borne my part with you in this first brunt, were I not by strong necessity held back for the present. Make account of me in the mean while, as of a man divided in myself with great pain, and as (natural bonds set aside) having my better part with you."

This is characteristic of Robinson. His heroism in the return to Leyden, to take up his work again with the aged and feebler remnant as pastor and leader in practical enterprises, was greater than it would have been had he sailed in the Mayflower.

The concluding paragraphs of the Southampton letter are very significant in their bearing upon the civil life of the exiles. One of these is as follows:

"Lastly, whereas you are become a body politic, using amongst yourselves civil government, and

<sup>1</sup> Pages 78-82.



are not furnished with any persons of special eminency above the rest, to be chosen by you into office of government, let your wisdom and godliness appear, not only in choosing such persons as do entirely love and will promote the common good, but also in yielding unto them all due honor and obedience in their lawful administrations; not beholding in them the ordinariness [i. e. commonplaceness or familiarity] of their persons, but God's ordinance for your good, not being like the foolish multitude who more honor the gay coat, than either the virtuous mind of the man or [the] glorious ordinance of the Lord. But you know better things, and that the image of the Lord's power and authority which the magistrate beareth is honorable, in how mean [commonplace] persons soever. And this duty you both may the more willingly and ought the more conscionably [i. e. conscientiously] to perform, because you are at least for the present to have only them for your ordinary governors, which [whom] yourselves shall make choice of for that work."

It is at once evident from this letter that Robinson anticipated the formation of the exiles into a "civill body politick" on precisely those lines which were laid down in the compact which was signed in the cabin of the Mayflower at Provincetown on November 11, or, according to our method of reckoning, November 21, 1620. He wrote his words of counsel to them for the pur-

pose of strengthening what he must have himself taught them in Leyden. It is very wholesome counsel. It shows the true democracy which he safeguarded by insistence upon the divine character of the power given to elected officers. This extract would serve a good purpose if read to-day at the beginning of every New England town meeting.

The details of Robinson's relation to the Merchant Adventurers as that bore on the possibility of his removal to Plymouth are somewhat obscure. But the general outlines of the matter are quite clear. These points are plain:

First, it was the intention of the Leyden church that the removal of the stronger and younger members should be preparatory to the final transfer of the entire membership, together with the pastor, who had remained behind. This intention was shared by the people and Robinson alike.

Second, it was for the highest spiritual welfare of the church that they should be united as quickly as possible, in order that the counsel and pastoral care of Robinson might be enjoyed by the church, and also that they might have the benefit of his strong practical wisdom.

But there was a division of interests. As the

Leyden-Plymouth church was the first Congregational church to illustrate the Separatist ideal clearly and persistently, so the Merchant Adventurers and business managers of the Pilgrim movement were the prototype of the second organization, which still continues in many churches of this order, the ecclesiastical society. They were the persons to provide the money for the support of the spiritual activities of the church, and their paramount interest was not spiritual, but financial and commercial. There were several considerations which weighed with them to induce them to oppose the bringing over of the Leyden remnant and the pastor. This remnant was composed of the older and weaker members of the church; in the development of the plans at Plymouth there was need of the strongest only. Then, too, the idea of the Separation was unwelcome to the men who had ventured money in the enterprise. However reasonable and catholic Robinson's views of the Separation might be, he was nevertheless one of its most pronounced defenders, and to men anxious chiefly for the success of a financial venture this was generally unwelcome and often repugnant.

It must be remembered that the settlement of Plymouth had been made under no specific grant

of freedom in religion. It was clearly enough the policy, not only of the officers of the Church of England, from whom such action was to be expected, but also of the crown, to secure the control of New England for episcopacy. Therefore, although the permission to remove and settle was granted with readiness, there was great official unwillingness to allow any radical Puritan or avowed Separatist minister to go to Plymouth.

These last years in Leyden were filled with the disappointments of vain attempts on Robinson's part to join his friends in Plymouth. A letter from Thomas Blossom, dated December 15, 1625, shows how keen the pastor's desire to go was. Blossom writes to the brethren at Plymouth:

"Alas! you would fain have had him with you, and he would as fain have come to you; many letters and much speech hath been about his coming to you, but never any solid course proposed for his going; if the course propounded the last year had appeared to have been certain, he would have gone with two or three families. I know no man amongst us knew his mind better than I did, about those things; he was loath to leave the ch., yet I know also, that he would have accepted the worst conditions wh. in the largest extent of a good conscience could be taken, to have come to you." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., Ser. 1, Vol. 3, p. 41. Year 1794.

Robinson himself wrote to Carver, "Assure yourself that my heart is with you, and that I will not foreslow my bodily coming at the first opportunity."<sup>1</sup> By the close of the year 1623 Robinson had become aware of the fact that the possibility of being able to go to America was very slight. He wrote to Brewster that he was obliged to call his transportation to America "desired, rather than hoped for." He saw that the only possible means of realizing the plan was that money should be sent from Plymouth for the purpose; but, even if that were accomplished, he clearly foresaw that the Adventurers would invent a reason to keep him in Holland. With his usual comprehensive clearness he summed up the matter in this way:

"We must dispose the adventurers into three parts; and of them some five or six (as I conceive) are absolutely bent for us above others.<sup>2</sup> Other five or six are our bitter, professed adversaries. The rest, being the body, I conceive to be honestly minded, and lovingly also toward us; yet such as have others, namely, the forward preachers, [i. e. the pronounced Puritans who did not go to

<sup>1</sup> "Of Plimoth Plantation," p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Among these was Sherley, who incurred the ill-will of the other adventurers by favoring the removal. He wrote to Plymouth in 1627, "The sole cause why the greater part of the adventurers malign me was that I would not side with them against you and the coming over of the Leyden people." See "New England's Memorial," p. 82, note.

the extreme of Separation], nearer unto them than us, and whose course [cause], so far as there is any difference, they would advance rather than ours."

The majority, therefore, was against the removal of the section of the church still remaining in Leyden. So long as the smaller number continued in Holland, Robinson was in duty bound to stay with them. It is very likely that the mere cost of transferring himself and his family might have been borne out of his own resources; but the question of his duty was supreme, and he could not leave Leyden so long as he was needed as pastor of the weaker remnant. He saw clearly that a part of the opposition to his removal came from Puritan preachers themselves, who had an eye on the colony at Plymouth and did not wish their possible market to be marred by Robinson's presence there. He knew that there were men among the Adventurers who would maliciously stop him if he once started for America. There is no intense bitterness in Robinson's letter over this condition; it is profound sorrow, rather, coupled with a prayer for patience, that breathes through his words.

The removal of the number who went to Plymouth necessarily lightened the load of Robin-

son's cares, and gave him more time for literary and controversial work. He was in his prime, between forty-five and fifty years of age. His literary work was very significant during these five years. The subject-matter of these books has been considered elsewhere; it is interesting to notice the array of titles. In 1624 were published his "Defense of the Doctrine Propounded by the Synod at Dort" and "An Appeal on Truth's Behalf (concerning some Differences in the Church at Amsterdam)." In 1625 appeared the first edition of the "Essays" and the edition in English of the "Apology." The latter appeared again in 1644 with the addition of "An Appendix to M. Perkins, his six Principles of Christian Religion," which was very probably prepared after 1620. He also wrote "A Treatise of the Lawfulness of Hearing of the Ministers in the Church of England," during the very last years of his life in Leyden. Hence there have remained some precious results from this trying experience of five years' hope deferred. If there had been no opposition to his removal to America, Robinson might have become so absorbed in the work of the Plymouth church that the "Essays" never would have been written, and the gracious treatise in behalf of wider fellowship never prepared.

Sorrows came to Robinson's home during these five years. On February 7, 1621, there was a burial in St. Peter's Church. It was a child of John and Bridget Robinson, whose name we do not know. The records of October 15, in the same year, state that they still had six children, the oldest of whom bore the names of their parents, John and Bridget. Isaac and James, Mercy and Fear, were the others. These were characteristic names. In March, 1623, the family circle was broken again, although we do not know the name of this child whose body also was interred in St. Peter's Church. It is to be regretted that no record has been discovered thus far which enables us to know more of the details of Robinson's home life. Those who knew him in his home have told us nothing, and no Boswell lived to preserve the commonplace sayings and deeds of the Leyden pastor.

The first letter which Governor Bradford has preserved in his Letter Book announcing the death of Robinson, was from Roger White, Mrs. Robinson's brother, and bears the date "Leyden, April 28, Anno 1625." It was addressed to Bradford, and the paragraph in reference to Robinson's death is as follows:

"These [letters] therefore are to give you to



understand, that it hath pleased the Lord to take out of this veil of tears your and our loving and faithful pastor, and my dear brother, Mr. John Robinson, who was sick some eight days, beginning first to be sick on a Saturday morning, yet the next day, being the Lord's day, he taught us twice, and the week after grew every day weaker than other, yet felt no pain but weakness, all the time of his sickness: the physie he took wrought kindly, in man's judgment, yet he grew every day weaker than other, feeling little or no pain, yet sensible, till the very last. Who fell sick the twenty-second of February, and departed this life the first of March. He had a continual inward ague, which brought the [flux] but I thank the Lord, was free of the plague, so that all his friends could come freely to him. And if either prayers, tears, or means would have saved his life, he had not gone hence. But he having faithfully finished his course, and performed his work, which the Lord had appointed him here to perform; he now rests with the Lord, in eternal happiness. We wanting him and all church Governours, not having one at present that is a governing officer among us." <sup>1</sup>

White speaks also of the great weakness of the Leyden remnant of the church since Robinson's death, and their yearning to be with the brethren in America.

<sup>1</sup> Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., Vol. 3, 1794, p. 40.

The second letter was from Thomas Blossom to Bradford and Brewster, and bore the date "Leyden, December 15, Anno 1625."

He speaks of the way in which the Lord has seemed to cross the success of those means which had been used to bring the separated sections of the church together, and especially that one,

"which would have been so comfortable unto us in that course, both for wisdom of counsel as also for our singular help in our course of godliness; whom the Lord (as it were) took away even as fruit falleth before it was ripe; when neither length of days, nor infirmity of body did seem to call for his end. The Lord even then took him away, as it were in his anger; whom if tears would have held, he had remained to this day. The loss of his ministry was very great unto me, for I ever counted myself happy in the enjoyment of it, notwithstanding all the crosses and losses, otherwise I sustained. Yet indeed the manner of his taking away hath more troubled me, as fearing the Lord's anger in it, that, as I said, in the ordinary course of things, might still have remained, as also, the singular service he might have yet done in the church of God. Alas! dear friends, our state and cause in religion by his death being wholly destitute of any that may defend our cause as it should against our adversaries."<sup>1</sup>

The news of their pastor's death struck the

<sup>1</sup> Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., Vol. 3, 1794, p. 41.

church in Plymouth with the deepest sorrow. They thought how their enemies had plotted against the pastor's coming to them, and how "the Lord had appointed him a better place." They heard of the death of King James of England and of Prince Maurice, who, White wrote, "both departed this life since my brother Robinson." Bradford copied the letter into his History, adding, "Death makes no difference." So the close of the reign of King James came at about the time Robinson's earthly ministry ended, as it had begun about the year in which Robinson first decided for the Separation. The man on the throne in England and the man fighting for freedom in Scrooby and Holland lived each his own life; it is for the Maker of all men to say which one was the better, braver and more helpful.

At this point we come face to face with one of the vexed questions in the story of Robinson's life. Writing concerning the character of the pastor, Winslow, in his "Brief Narration" says:

"When God took him away from them and us by death, the University and ministers of the city accompanied him to his grave with all their accustomed solemnities, bewailing the great loss that not only that particular church had whereof he was pastor, but some of the chief of them sadly affirmed that all the churches of Christ sustained

a loss by the death of that worthy instrument of the Gospel.”<sup>1</sup>

This report comes from Winslow, who was not in Leyden in 1625, and must, therefore, have learned the details concerning the honor paid to Robinson by ministers and members of the University through reports from the Leyden brethren.

We also must bear in mind that there is no mention of this fact in the letters which either White or Blossom wrote as to Robinson's death, at least so far as these have been preserved for us. But those letters do not refer to the funeral in any way. When, therefore, Sumner uses this silence of the letters as an argument for the untrustworthy character of the statement concerning the public funeral,<sup>2</sup> he is giving quite too much weight to those documents. He says that members of Robinson's congregation wrote letters to their former companions in Plymouth in which they “give minute particulars of his [Robinson's] death.” But the letters of Blossom and White (and Sumner refers to no others) are provokingly indefinite concerning Robinson's death, and they have no mention whatever of the time, place or manner of his burial.

<sup>1</sup> See Young, “Chronicles,” p. 392.

<sup>2</sup> See Sumner's “Memoirs,” p. 54.

A second argument used by Sumner to render the evidence of Winslow doubtful, is the fact that, at this time, the plague was raging in Leyden, and on this account all public funerals were suspended. Sumner reports that this was customary in Leyden, even if the deceased had not died of the plague. For this statement he offers no authority.

White, however, asserts distinctly that Robinson was not afflicted with the plague, and that his friends were permitted freely to see him. If this was true, there is nothing unlikely in the statement that Robinson's funeral was attended by ministers and members of the University.

Even Sumner's statement is not to be accepted too literally. Dr. Dexter made an examination<sup>1</sup> of the facts which Sumner urges in support of his argument, and he found as a result of his investigations that "the storm [of the plague] had passed before Robinson died; and, though the plague may still have been lingering in the city, it had at that time ceased 'raging' in Leyden."

Another point to be borne in mind when we come to sift this matter of a public funeral, is that the words "accompanied him to his grave" do not refer to any long procession or stately ceremony. The place of burial was only across the

<sup>1</sup> See Mass. Hist. Soc. *Proceedings*, January, 1872, pp. 184, 185.

street from Robinson's house. This house was in immediate proximity to the University of which Robinson was a member and certainly well known.

There is, therefore, no reason whatever, either on the one hand to infer a stately ceremony and great procession of professors and preachers, or, on the other, to think of an obscure and private funeral. Undoubtedly, members of the University were present; doubtless, the service was conducted by some minister of a Reformed Church and the body of the Separatist pastor was laid to rest with dignity and honor in the grave that had been prepared for it under the floor of St. Peter's Church.

For many years the location of Robinson's grave was unknown. Certainly it was a mistake of Prince to state that he was buried in the chancel of a church which had been granted to his congregation by the government. We have seen that no such grant was made the Leyden brethren by the magistrates.

The credit for locating the burial place belongs to George Sumner, who found in a small closet in St. Peter's Church at Leyden a number of dusty record books, one of which contains a list of burial

fees of Leyden churches. Here, under the record of St. Peter's Church is found this:

[1625]	[florins]
10 Mart. Open en huer van Jan Robens engels	
predekant	9
(Opening and rent for John Robinson, English	
preacher, 9 florins) <sup>1</sup>	

This record, therefore, informs us that the sum of nine florins was paid for opening the grave and renting it for a period of years. This payment was made six days after the interment. There is a record of this in the book of interments of the city as follows:

[1625]
4 Maart. Jan Roelends, Predicant van de Eng-
elsche Gemeente, by Let Klockhuijs,—
begraven in de Pieter's Kerk.
(John Robinson, Preacher of the English congre-
gation, by the Belfry,—buried in the Peter's
Church).

Two points are of interest in this matter of the interment and rent. Sumner claimed that the sum, nine florins, was the lowest paid for any person whose burial is recorded.<sup>2</sup> This seemed to him to indicate a condition of considerable poverty, since only journeymen-weavers and persons

<sup>1</sup> Facsimile in Sumner's "Memoirs," opposite p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

from the humblest walks of life paid such small sums for grave rent. Dr. Dexter, however, investigated the matter very thoroughly, and positively contradicts these statements. He found from the very registers which Sumner consulted that, out of 253 records of burial rents in St. Peter's Church and the neighboring churchyard during the year 1625, only seven were over nine florins, eighty paid nine florins, and 128 were as low as four florins. The average of all is a little over six florins. And it is a significant fact that the rent paid for the burial-place of Arminius in 1609 was only six florins.

Therefore, instead of being a burial in great poverty, Robinson's burial was quite in accordance with that position of dignity and influence which is assigned to him by writers like Winslow.

Still another point on which we have been misinformed is the matter of the removal of remains of bodies from graves in St. Peter's Church. Sumner stated that the sum paid for Robinson's burial was "only for the hire, for a few years, of a place immediately under the pavement in one of a large number of square pits containing space sufficient for four coffins. *At the end of seven years, these bodies were all removed.*"

The unpleasant idea, therefore, has come to be



very general that, after a short interval, the mortal remains of Robinson were removed by the workmen of the church from the spot to which they had been consigned by the devoted and bereaved members of his remnant church.

This statement of Sumner, however, was not confirmed by M. de Pecker, on whose authority Sumner makes it, when, in 1865, Dr. Dexter questioned him concerning it. Sumner had made the statements which we have been quoting in his communication to the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1842. In 1871, Dr. Dexter investigated the subject again, and published another opinion on the authority of M. de Pecker, reinforced at this second investigation by other satisfactory authorities, that the bodies buried, as Robinson's was, in St. Peter's Church, "remained undisturbed *for fifteen years*, at the end of which time the pit was opened, *the excavation was made deeper, so as to sink out of sight whatever remained*, and then a new burial took place in the thus remade grave."

On Friday, July 24, 1891, a bronze tablet to the memory of Robinson was unveiled in Leyden. The house which occupies the ground on which Robinson's home stood, in Belfry Lane, had been appropriately marked twenty-six years before by a small inscription in these words:

“On this spot lived, taught, and died John Robinson, 1611-1625.”

It seemed fitting that a still larger memorial should be erected to Robinson in Leyden. Action to this end was taken at a meeting of the Congregational churches in the United States, held in Detroit, Michigan, in 1877. A resolution was then adopted expressing a hearty approval of the plan to erect a memorial in Leyden “to the memory of John Robinson, whose name will ever head the list of the pastors of the Congregational Churches of the United States.” A committee was appointed to take the matter in charge. Funds were secured by subscription in America. The committee decided upon a bronze tablet, to be affixed to the outside wall of St. Peter’s Church, opposite Robinson’s house. This wall contained a recess in the brick work about seven feet high and six feet wide in which a tablet would be sheltered by a coping of stone. In this position the memorial would indicate appropriately the place of Robinson’s burial and be near his house and the University. The tablet bears a figure of a ship in low relief, under which are the words, “The Mayflower, 1620.” Underneath this is the inscription in severely plain Roman letters reading as follows:

IN MEMORY OF

REV. JOHN ROBINSON, M. A.

PASTOR OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH WORSHIPING OVER AGAINST THIS  
SPOT, A.D. 1609-1625, WHENCE AT HIS PROMPTING WENT FORTH

THE PILGRIM FATHERS

TO SETTLE NEW ENGLAND

IN 1620.

---

BURIED UNDER THIS HOUSE OF WORSHIP, 4 MAR. 1625

ÆT XLIX YEARS.

---

*In memoria æterna erit justus.*

---

ERECTED BY THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCHES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

A. D. 1891.

The Dutch civil and ecclesiastical authorities met the proposition to erect the monument most heartily, and representatives of the city, the University and of the Reformed Church spoke at the exercises of dedication.<sup>1</sup> They bore witness to the loving memory in which the Separatist pastor's name is still held in Holland, where it is forever linked with the ideals of religious liberty, fidelity to principle, toleration, and loyalty to revealed truth. This yet remains in Holland, as in America, an abiding influence.

<sup>1</sup> See "Proceedings at the Unveiling of the John Robinson Memorial Tablet in Leyden, Holland, July 24, 1891." Boston: Thomas Todd, 1891.

A larger memorial to the life and character of Robinson is the church building erected in Gainsborough, the corner-stone of which was laid June 29, 1896, by United States Ambassador Thomas F. Bayard. Toward the completion of the structure the Congregational churches in America made a generous contribution in witness of their debt to Robinson. The building is fittingly placed in Gainsborough, not because this is surely the place of his birth, but because the city is so closely connected with the Separatist movement and it seems quite certain with Robinson himself.

Before turning from the records of these last five years of Robinson's life, it is necessary to take up a question which arises concerning his relation to the Reformed Churches. There are certain documents which demand consideration before an opinion can be rendered.

The first of these is the testimony of Governor Edward Winslow concerning the practice of Leyden Church and its pastor, published in his "*Hypocrisie Unmasked*," from which we have already quoted on pages 244-247. Winslow says:

"I am earnestly requested to clear up another gross mistake which caused many, and still doth, to judge the harder of New England and the churches there 'because (say they) the Church of



THE MAYFLOWER 1620.

IN MEMORY OF

REV. JOHN ROBINSON, M.A.

PASTOR OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH WORSHIPING OVER AGAINST  
THIS SPOT, A.D. 1609-1625, WHENCE AT HIS PROMPTING  
WENT FORTH

THE PILGRIM FATHERS

TO SETTLE NEW ENGLAND  
IN 1620.

BURIED UNDER THIS HOUSE OF WORSHIP 4 MAR. 1625  
ÆT XLIX YEARS.

IN MEMORIA AETERNA ERIT JUSTUS.

ERECTED BY THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCHES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

A.D. 1891.

A MEMORIAL TABLET



Plymouth, which went first from Leyden, were Schismatics, Brownists, rigid Separatists, &c., having Mr. Robinson for their pastor, who made and to the last professed separation from the other churches of Christ, &c. And the rest of the churches in New England, holding communion with that church, are to be reputed such as they are.'

"For answer to this aspersion, first, he that knew Mr. Robinson either by his doctrine daily taught, or hath read his 'Apology,' published not long before his death, or knew the practice of that church of Christ under his government, or was acquainted with the wholesome counsel he gave that part of the church which went for New England at their departure and afterward, might easily resolve the doubt and take off the aspersion.

"For his doctrine, I living three years under his ministry, before we began the work of plantation in New England, it was always against separation from any of the churches of Christ; professing and holding communion both with the French and Dutch churches, yea, tendering it to the Scotch also, as I shall make appear more particularly anon; ever holding forth how wary persons ought to be in separating from a Church, and that till Christ the Lord departed wholly from it, man ought not to leave it, only to bear witness against the corruption that was in it.

"But if any object, he separated from the Church of England and wrote largely against it, but yet

let me tell you he allowed hearing the godly ministers preach and pray in the public assemblies; yea, he allowed private communion<sup>1</sup> not only with them, but all that were faithful in Christ Jesus in the kingdom and elsewhere upon all occasions; yea, honored them for the power of godliness, above all other the professors of religion in the world.”<sup>2</sup>

“’Tis true, I confess, he was more rigid in his course and way at first than toward his latter end; for his study was peace and union, so far as might agree with faith and a good conscience; and for schism and division, there was nothing in the world more hateful to him. But for the government of the Church of England, as it was in the Episcopal way, the Liturgy, and stinted prayers of the Church then, yea, the constitution of it as National, and so consequently the corrupt communion of the unworthy with the worthy receivers of the Lord’s Supper, these things were never approved of him, but witnessed against to his death, and are by the church over which he was, to this day.”

“The next thing I would have the reader take notice of is, that however the Church of Leyden differed in some particulars, [it] yet made no schism or separation from the Reformed Churches, but held communion with them occasionally. For we ever placed a large difference between those that grounded their practice upon the word of God, (though differing from us in the exposition or un-

<sup>1</sup> For the definition of private as distinct from public communion see pp. 170, 171.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson remained English to the core, honoring the piety of his fellow countrymen even when driven into Separation.



derstanding of it) and those that hated such Reformers and Reformation, and went on in anti-christian opposition to it and persecution of it, as the late Lord Bishops did, who would not in deed and truth (whatever their pretences were) that Christ should rule over them."

"As for the Dutch, it was usual for our members that understood the language and lived in or occasionally came over to Leyden, to communicate with them, as one John Jenny, a brewer, long did, his wife and family, &c., and without any offence to the church."

"And for the French churches,<sup>1</sup> that we held and do hold communion with them, take notice of our practice at Leyden, viz., that one Samuel Terry was received from the French church there into communion with us."

"For the truth is, the Dutch and French churches, either of them being a people distinct from the world, and gathered into a holy communion, and not national churches,—nay so far from it as I verily believe the sixth person is not of the church,—the difference is so small (if moderately pondered between them and us) as we dare not for the world deny communion with them."<sup>2</sup>

This statement by Winslow furnishes the background for an estimate of the significance of two other documents which are concerned with Robinson's relations to the Reformed Churches.

<sup>1</sup> These were Reformed churches, like the Dutch.

<sup>2</sup> Young, "*Chronicles*," Boston, 1841, pp. 387-395. Also "*Hypocrisy Unmasked*," 1646, (copy in Boston Public Library), pp. 92-96.

The first of these is the "Seven Articles which ye Church of Leyden sent to ye Counsell of England" in 1618,<sup>1</sup> to which reference has been made on page 232. The articles are brief and as follows:

1. To ye confession of fayth published in ye name of ye Church of England & to every artikell theerof wee do w<sup>th</sup> ye reformed churches wheer wee live & also els where assent wholly.

2. As wee do acknolidg ye docktryne of fayth theer tawght so do wee ye fruites and effectks of ye same docktryne to ye begetting of saving fayth in thousands in ye land (conformistes & reformistes) as ye ar called w<sup>th</sup> whom also as w<sup>th</sup> our bretheren wee do desyer to keepe sperituall communion in peace and will pracktis in our parts all lawfull thinges.

3. The King's Majesty wee acknolidg for Supream Governor in his Dominion in all causes and over all parsons [sic], and y none maye decklyne or apeale from his authority or judgment in any cause whatsoever, but y in all thinges obedience is dewe unto him, ether active, if ye thing commanded be not agaynst God's woord, or passive yf itt bee, except pardon can bee obtayned.

4. Wee judg itt lawfull for his Majesty to apoynt bishops, civill overseers, or officers in awthority onder hime, in ye severall provinces, dioses, congregations or parrishes to oversee ye Churches and governe them civilly according to ye Lawes of ye

<sup>1</sup> N. Y. Hist. Soc., "Collections," Series 2, Vol. iii, Part i, pp. 293-302.

Land, untto whom ye ar in all thinges to geve an account & by them to bee ordered according to Godlynes.

5. The authority of ye present bishops in ye Land wee do acknolidg so far forth as ye same is indeed derived from his Majesty untto them and as ye proceed in his name, whom wee will also therein honor in all things and hime in them.

6. Wee beleeve yt no sinod, classes, convocation or assembly of Ecclesiasticall Officers hath any power or awthority att all but as ye same by ye Majestraet geven unto them.

7. Lastly, wee desyer to geve untto all Superiors dew honnor to preserve ye unity of ye sperritt w<sup>th</sup> all y feare God, to have peace w<sup>th</sup> all men what in us lyeth & wheerein wee err to bee instructed by any. Subscribed by

JOHN ROBINSON

and

WILLYAM BRUSTER."

These articles were written for the express purpose of minimizing the differences between the Separatists and the Reformed Churches in order that the English authorities might more readily grant the request of Leyden Church to remove to America. They must be interpreted in the light of Robinson's "Apology," issued a year later, especially chapters 11 and 12, "Of Civil Magistrates" and "Of the Church of England."<sup>1</sup> The "Articles" simply

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 62-79.

express in concise form propositions which are more fully elaborated in the "Apology." They show Robinson's growing agreement with the faith and practice of the Reformed Churches, but they do not contain the least suggestion that he ever considered the Separation unnecessary or personally stood ready to abandon it. The statements of the "Apology" are definite in this regard. Robinson held steadfastly that the constitution of the Church of England was such that he must "make a plain secession and separation from it."<sup>1</sup> He could not give the honor to it that was due "to the Church of Christ, rightly collected and constituted."<sup>2</sup> The kindlier regard in which he came to hold the bishops of the Church of England for their personal Christian faith and character did not alter his judgment that the episcopate as defined by Robert Parker was a false and tyrannical institution.<sup>3</sup> In short, the Separation from the Church of England was maintained to the last by Robinson, however closely he might have been drawn toward fellowship with the Reformed churches.

The last document to be considered is from the Amsterdam Scotch Presbyterian Church records,

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 63.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

discovered by Dr. Henry Martyn Dexter in 1872, a facsimile of which has been published.<sup>1</sup> It is a single folio sheet, written in two hands. The text in either case seems to correspond with the signature, so that we probably have here a document written and signed by the two men whose names it bears.

The translation is as follows:

I, the undersigned, declare by this that D. Rubensonus, minister of the English church in this place, which is called that of the Brownists, has spoken with me many times of the schism between their congregation and the congregation of the other English in this country; and that he has testified many times that he was inclined to do his best to remove this schism between them and the others; also, that he did not intend to bring up his son as a minister of such a congregation, but much preferred to have his service employed in the Dutch congregations; furthermore, to this end he had begun, through the good offices of D. Telius and me, to move some good people in Middelburg that they might furnish some honest support for his son's studies for some years; further, he has declared to me many times that, finding here so many difficulties in his congregation in the way of accomplishing this, he had therefore resolved upon removing with a good part of his congregation to the West Indies, where he did not doubt that he

<sup>1</sup> "Testimonium to John Robinson by A. Walaëus. Photolithographic facsimile with modern transcript and English translation." Boston Public Library \* \* G. 31. S3 A.

could carry out this design. This has passed between us in this way many times.

Datum in Leyden 25 May, 1628.

ANTONIUS WALAEUS,  
Professor of Sacred Theology.

What has been testified here above on the union of both the English churches in this country, I, the undersigned, declare also to have heard from D. Robinson, late deceased.

At Leyden, 26 May a. 1628.

FESTUS HOMMIUS,  
Coll. Theol. Regens.

Concerning the circumstances under which this paper was prepared, its history, and the reason for its preservation, I am not able to gain any satisfactory information, and am thrown back entirely upon internal evidence as to its meaning. There is nothing to warrant any grave doubt as to the genuineness of the document. Its authors were members of the divinity faculty of Leyden University. They were trustworthy men. They state that they enjoyed an intimate acquaintance with Robinson, which adds still further weight of evidence to our belief that he held a dignified and closely personal relationship to the University, as Winslow states that he did.

Two points are noteworthy:

1. What is meant by the other English congregation or churches "in this country"? Evidently it does not mean Leyden, for Walaeus describes Robinson as "minister of the English church in this place"; if he had meant congregations in Leyden he would naturally have written "the congregation of the other English *here*," rather than "*in this country*." Hommius also uses "country" instead of "city." It would hardly seem to refer simply to the Separatist churches in Amsterdam, for the schism between them was not great enough to warrant the emphasis laid upon it here.

Perhaps light may be thrown upon the matter from the "Apology," where Robinson says: "Our faith is not negative, as papists used to object to the evangelical churches; nor which consists in the condemning of others, and wiping their names out of the bead-roll of churches, but in the edifying of ourselves; neither require we of any of ours, in the confession of their faith, that they either renounce, or, in one word, contest with the Church of England, whatsoever the world clamours of us this way. Our faith is founded upon the writings of the prophets and apostles, in which no mention of the Church of England is made. We deem it our duty what is found in them to 'believe, with the heart to right-

eousness, and to confess with the tongue to salvation.' Rom. x. 10."<sup>1</sup>

Before 1625 Robinson, while still holding to Separation, as we have just shown, had perceived that the remains of his church, with which he was compelled to stay in Holland, must be built up on a positive faith, to which the Separation was not essential as a saving doctrine. This ideal he evidently sought to realize, and was ready to welcome members to his congregation from the body of all English-speaking Christians in Holland. There is certainly no other practical interpretation to give to these words from the "Apology," and this seems also to explain the purpose of Robinson attested to by the document under consideration. Robinson was not aiming at the organic union of any two English-speaking congregations, so much as the building up of a congregation on a positive basis, of which the Separation, although a part, was not an essential element.

2. The removal to the West Indies referred to is open to question. Does it mean the general discussion of the movement to America which took place in 1620? Or did Robinson, finding himself prevented from going to Plymouth, hope to go to another place in the New World with a congrega-

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 63.



tion gathered on this broader basis? There is no record elsewhere of the latter purpose. White and Blossom did not know of it. Robinson always desired to go to Plymouth. The most reasonable interpretation of the document would make this refer to Robinson's persistent desire to go to Plymouth with his Leyden congregation.

The fact that he was desirous of having his son educated for the ministry in the Reformed Church is not strange; it implies no abandonment of the Separation or repudiation of the twelfth chapter of the "Apology." Robinson was in closest sympathy with the Reformed Church; he finally saw no future for a Separatist church in Leyden, even in the light of his ideal for its broader and more positive structure; the Reformed Church seemed therefore the best place for his son to exercise his ministry.

If we were to make a conjecture concerning the significance of the document which we have thus considered it would be this: when, after Robinson's death, members of his family and church desired to enter the fellowship of the Reformed churches, this testimonial from theological professors who knew him was drawn up, in order that their admission might be made easier and their heartier welcome assured. The testimonial itself is explained by the "Apology," with which it is consistent.



XV

THE MAN AND HIS PLACE IN HISTORY



## CHAPTER XV

### THE MAN AND HIS PLACE IN HISTORY

THERE is no picture and no recorded description of Robinson. We have nothing from which to make any inference as to his personal appearance. We do know the character of his mind and heart and the sweetness and strength of his spirit, however, and this is far more important.

Naturally the first light in which we tend to regard him is as a controversialist and a defender of the doctrines of the Separation. To the majority, without doubt, the mention of Robinson's name suggests a stern, rigid defender of a faith.

Therefore, we will consider Robinson briefly as he stands before us in the attitude of a controversialist. We must remember that he entered this field, not because he chose to do so in obedience to any native bent in disposition, but because he was forced to do so. His desire was for pastoral work and not for contention or controversy.

When he once became a champion he was pronounced and persistent. He records the struggle

through which he passed in entering the Separation, and then confesses that he carried it to the bitter end. The spirit in which he carried on his battles, however, was irenic. As Winslow says,

“His study was peace and union so far as might agree with faith and a good conscience; and for schism and division, there was nothing in the world more hateful to him.”<sup>1</sup>

There is abundant proof of this on every side when we come to his preserved writings. Perhaps there is not a better illustration of this than the preface to his “Lawfulness of Hearing,” which has already been quoted on pages 179-182.

Robinson was honest in the use of a conflicting argument. This is in marked contrast to the practice of many of those opposing him. One who reads widely in the literature of controversy soon learns to expect from any controversialist the claim that the adverse party has dealt unfairly with his arguments. Robinson occasionally makes this complaint, but expressly disavows any intention to use such a method himself. He sought to state the positions of his antagonists, he says, “without any the least wrong (to my knowledge) unto him or his cause; as, having left out nothing

<sup>1</sup> “Hypocrisy Unmasked,” p. 93, quoted in Dexter, “Congregationalism as Seen” p. 406.

in his writing, which might seem to bring advantage to his purpose.”<sup>1</sup> We have found no cases in which Robinson’s opponents claim that he has been dishonest in his treatment of their attitude.

He was sometimes harsh in his invective,<sup>2</sup> but it was the custom and spirit of the time, and, as we have noticed elsewhere, when Robinson’s terms are compared with those employed by the other Separatists, or, almost without exception, by any of the controversialists of the time, they are far less harsh.

There is always one greatest fact about a man. If we grasp that fact, we have the secret of his strength and the clue to the interpretation of his character. The character of Robinson must be interpreted from the standpoint of religion. Religion seemed to him the principal thing about a nation or about an individual.<sup>3</sup> It certainly was the principal fact about him. He tells his friends that the two realms in which he takes his chief delight are divinity and logic.<sup>4</sup> We may question the soundness of his logic, but never the consistency of his religion. He conceived religion on its personal side as that relationship which

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 286.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 3: 285, 305.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1: 32.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3: 330.

the individual bears to his God.<sup>1</sup> The religious man, as Robinson regarded him, recognized always the relations of civil society. The obligations of family and state are not dissolved by religion; they are sanctified by it. The sanction of good government and stable homes is religion. John Robinson never inclined in the least toward a hierarchy. He defended the state and the civil ruler, and taught that the same obedience was due the magistrate, whether he were a Christian or a pagan. No tendency such as that which resulted in the anarchy at Muenster found sanction in Robinson's teaching.

We have taken a brief view of Robinson's theology in the consideration of the defense of the Dort creed. The religious life of Robinson is more winsome than his dogma. The sternness of his theology is more pronounced than the rigor of his personal religious life. That life gathers about a personal relationship between his own soul and God. It is the God of the Covenant who rules in the world that he has made. Robinson does not lay as great emphasis upon the personal, spiritual mastership of Jesus, or the discipleship of the Christian, as he does upon the covenant obligation of the individual soul to

<sup>1</sup> Works, 1: 33.



God. His religious life centered itself in God the Father.

His whole view of the world was colored by his personal religion. This is seen in his conception of the physical order, which is the work of God's hands. "The artisan leaves his work, being once formed, to himself," he says, "but God, by continual influx, preserves and orders both the being and motions of all creatures."<sup>1</sup> The manner in which Robinson seems to catch a glimpse of the great laws according to which the natural order is controlled is exceedingly interesting. The sun and moon and stars have such an influence upon the earth that they are able "to change, order, and dispose the air, earth and water." They are thus seen to be endowed with virtues "far above the most precious pearls, or any earthly quintessence." (Job 38: 31-33.) Their position produces the natural changes which we see in the air and water. At the same time it does not remove the personal activity of God from the physical world. It rather makes God's personal presence the more necessary, just as the complex variety of a clock's movements is a tribute to the wisdom and skill of the man who made the clock. In this way Robinson sought to do justice to the

<sup>1</sup> Works 1: 15.

ordered course of the physical universe, and also save the doctrine of God's personal presence in it as its Creator and Governor.

There is nothing in Robinson's writings to show that he found delight in the natural world for its own sake. The world seemed to him to manifest God; but there is nowhere any sign that he rejoiced, like Luther, in woods and flowers, sunny days and blue skies. The great German could feed his soul on the outlook over the beautiful Thuringian forest from the Wartburg, or take keen delight in an excursion from Wittenberg into the country. Of this there is no evidence in Robinson. Not once does he express any rejoicing in the beauty of rural England or Holland.

Robinson's conception of the social order is colored very often by his sense of the prevalence and awfulness of human sin. There is little true good in the world, he says:

"In heaven is only rest without labor; in hell, restless pain and torment: and as sin makes the earth, which is between both, liker to hell, than heaven; so God for sin hath given to the sons of man sore travail to afflict them upon earth."<sup>1</sup>

Robinson thought of the awful punishments inflicted upon sinners, and there seemed to be noth-

<sup>1</sup> Works, 1: 114.

ing fearful enough to warrant it; but when he looked around in daily life and saw the manner in which men lived in sheer contempt of God, it seemed to him as if no punishment could be severe enough for sin.<sup>1</sup>

Robinson is not a pessimist and purveyor of despair, however; there is another side to his view of life. All men are, he confesses, the children of wrath, and the world is lost in sin; but upon this dark background appears the full radiance of his ideal of human salvation. Robinson's hope and joy in the glorious thought of human redemption are simply unbounded. His soul leaps at the thought of the life of the saints of God on earth. This is a very heaven. The little community of believers whom he served in the ministry was filled with the "beauty of Zion and the glory of the Lord." To him this fact was an experimental comfort that far outweighed the depression which his sense of the world's sin might naturally have had upon him.

Therefore Robinson was not a pessimist; his work was done in hopefulness, sweetness and good cheer. A weaker soul might have become a prophet of despair if he were compelled to reach his final conclusion concerning the meaning of life

<sup>1</sup> Works, 1: 214.

as a whole from this initial consciousness of the fearful character of human sin. This serious, somber tendency in Robinson was offset by the sanity and hope of his dominant mood. He took the same view of himself that he took of the world.

"When I consider," he says, "how little good I myself do, in my meanness, and others my like, to that which I should, and might do, if I did my utmost, I find reason to be most angry at myself, and mine own unprofitableness."

Out of the self-rebuking conclusions of these periods of introspection, he always comes with his soul "filled with spiritual joy." This joy grows out of his assurance of personal salvation. He breaks out at one time with this:

"How much I am comforted in this very consideration, against my vile and corrupt nature, which, notwithstanding, I am persuaded the Lord will never so far suffer to rebel, as that it shall not be tamed and subdued by this strong hand of God, without which it might every day and hour so hazard my salvation."<sup>1</sup>

It is not always easy to appreciate such a temper as this. It is the manner in which Paul looked at his life. Sometimes with strong cryings the soul breaks forth, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

<sup>1</sup> Works, 2: 227.

Then the spirit asserts its dominant mood and shouts its song of victory, "I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord." To one who does not appreciate the Christian experience, such a record of seeming conflict between despair and rejoicing seems inconsistent. Men who report the experience are generally misjudged. Francis of Assisi is seen standing in the presence of his angry father, having renounced even the clothing that covered him, or wandering among the robbers on Mount Subasio and thrown by them into the snow. It all seems so hard, so bitter and so unlovely! Francis singing for joy on Mount Subasio even while the robbers stripped him; Francis with his companions winning village after village in the Umbrian plain, by the very contagion of their joy, to a new life of hope and righteousness:—these facts are not regarded by him who has taken offense at renunciations and leper hospitals. These are the facts that interpret Francis of Assisi, however. A more radiantly happy soul never exulted before God than the man of utter poverty and sacrifice.

All the great exemplars and defenders of the Christian faith have had this deep distress and this supreme rapture. Individual temperament modifies the experience in its details; but the

fundamental attitude toward sin and salvation is common to them all. The Separatist pastor never can be called cold, joyless or stern by those who know the real experience of his heart.

This vivid conception of the meaning of personal salvation resulted in that passion for righteousness in which we must seek more and more for the real cause of the Separation. It has been common to hold that the Separation was grounded in a failure to comprehend the great law of development in the church, through a lack of historical knowledge and appreciation; but chiefly in the Calvinistic theology, which demanded a church made up of the elect.<sup>1</sup> That all these were reasons for the Separation is not to be denied. The idea of development is given scant recognition by Robinson; and he was a Calvinist of the Calvinists. But all these interpretations fail to take sufficient notice of the passion for righteousness which was the great practical motive in the work of men like him. The Separation was not a movement inspired by any *a priori* idea of the church as the body of the elect; it was not undertaken or carried out with the supreme purpose of embodying a dogma in an institution. It was inspired by a zeal for righteousness; its genius was practical

<sup>1</sup> See Weingarten, "Independentismus und Quakerthum," pp. 12, 13.

and not dogmatic. Robinson was a reformer first and an advocate and a theologian afterwards. So was Robert Browne. We must never lose this element from the story of the Separation.

Robinson was not a headstrong and inconsiderate champion of reform. In his "Essays" no less than in his controversies he stands before us as a man of wide and discriminating observation. His catholicity of outlook upon life saved him from the snare of bigotry and intolerance. Every reform is full of danger. Every reformer stands in peril of narrowness and of failure to comprehend the wider relations of the cause that is dear to its champion; but here Robinson does not break down.

The picture is briefly this: A young, enthusiastic Christian preacher and pastor, in the orders of the Church of England, yearned with all his soul to see the visible, practical results of his preaching and pastoral care in the changed lives and Christian character of the people. He found himself hemmed in on every side by the theory and constitution of a state church. Accepting as he did the full, final authority of the Scriptures, and believing that a righteous life was the inevitable issue of regeneration in the soul, he sought the solution of his difficulty in the New Testament.

There he found an organization of the church which was not only unlike but contrary to the parish unit and the episcopal authority of the Church of England. He found the solution of his problem in the complete secession from the system of government with which he was connected. His Calvinistic theology helped him on to his decision; but the first impulse and the controlling motive in the entire movement were practical and not doctrinal.

Robinson was a man of wide reading and fairly profound learning. His "Essays" especially disclose acquaintance with the great classical and church writers. These he does not treat in any critical way, nor does he seem to regard them for the intrinsic value of their style or thought. He uses them rather as reflecting and illustrating human life in its many aspects and interests. In this he resembles Martin Luther.<sup>1</sup> This width of reach with which Robinson cast his net, in drawing his observations "out of the great volume of men's manners," is noteworthy. His literary work was narrowed for the most part to the necessities of partisan debate; he ministered to a small community which was fighting for life under hard conditions. It would have been natural for

<sup>1</sup> See Kolde, "Martin Luther," 1: 41, 95.



him to confine his study to the acquisition of material to strengthen his arguments and stay his soul in conflict. But he did not limit himself in this way. The larger human interest never was lost in the heat and narrowness of partisan conflict.

As a matter of course he was preeminently a student of the Christian Scriptures. These he studied and used at first hand. He was familiar with the Septuagint, Vulgate, and English translations of the Bible; he used commentaries and interpretations. But his appeal was always to the "Word" directly.<sup>1</sup> The critical temper was foreign to him. He has slight use for the Church Fathers, who seemed to him to have been responsible for introducing and defending a false order of the church.

There is a merry side to the man, as we have noticed already from an examination of his "Essays." Many a dreary page of painful polemic is lightened up by a jest or a bit of humor. His themes are serious and his style inclined to be severe. In the "Essays" and the "People's Plea" he is especially happy in illustrations. He compares an opponent who has striven to make a good appearance with a poor argument to "the stage-player, who, with too much wiping of his borrowed

<sup>1</sup> Works, 3: 297, 304, 311.

beard, pulls it from his face, and so betrays his bare chin.”<sup>1</sup> In another place, he discovers the inconsistency in the arguments of an opponent and says if only his antagonist had remembered the command not to yoke an ox and an ass together he would not have argued so badly.

In one of his essays he turns sharply against rich men who have little wisdom to save them.

“A poor and plain person, seeing a Dives ruffle in silks and glitter in gold and silver, is half ready to worship him as a petty god many times; but after finds by his speech and other carriage, by which a fool and wise man are differenced, that if he had so done, he had but worshipped a golden calf.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus Robinson, the theologian, reformer, controversialist, had a merrier side. He knew how to jest as well as how to preach or debate. It is this less known side of his personality that constitutes the greater charm of the man. He is not deficient on the friendly side of his character. Had he lived to-day he would have been a desirable travel-companion for a summer holiday; one would have been ready to cast a fly with him in the Maine waters during the ministerial vacation.

One of the strongest impressions that Robinson

<sup>1</sup> Works, 1: 185.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 1: 125.

makes upon us is that he is a growing, developing personality. From the first clear view which we gain of him until the very end of his life, it is possible to follow him step by step in the course of his development. This fact gives his character its splendid human interest. He is a vital part of the movement of his time, making it and made by it. He answers our desire for a living personality, advancing in mental grasp and positive achievement with the years.

The strength of Robinson's personality is best apprehended by considering the impression which he made upon his contemporaries and, most of all, by recalling the history of his own congregation.

William Bradford and William Brewster were strong men. Of this there can be no question. They set their mark deeply upon the subsequent life of New England. And for a man to hold their deep respect, loyal love and self-sacrificing following, as Robinson did, meant great personal strength on the part of the pastor.

Bradford's tribute to Robinson<sup>1</sup> is earnest and comprehensive of all his strong qualities; but the testimony concerning the impression which Robinson's personality produced is not confined simply to the witness which men like Bradford bore.

<sup>1</sup> "Of Plimoth Plantation," 24 ff. N. E. Memorial, 353.

The whole history of the Leyden church is the larger and conspiring witness to the same fact. To be sure, such men as Bradford, Brewster, Cushman, Carver and Thomas Fuller were members of the congregation, and that in itself gave it a character far higher than the Ancient London Church or Smyth's congregation ever had. It is useless to speculate upon the manner in which Johnson and Ainsworth might have prospered in the care of the Leyden congregation, or how far John Robinson might have succeeded in blending and saving the discordant elements which made up the Ancient London Church. The fact is that the Leyden pastor made his congregation and the congregation made its pastor. It is one of those rare reactions of personal influence which it is a joy to contemplate and a pleasure to record. The situation that confronts us in history is simply this: in the development of a radical movement involving not only a theory of church government, but the founding of an institution to express the ideal, every effort to achieve the practical realization had gone to pieces, and the ideal itself had become discredited, owing to the lack of a dominant personality strong enough and far-sighted enough to master and promote the practical enterprise. At last a man emerged,

able, not only essentially to modify the ideal and to commend it, even to its former critics, by its sweetness and sanity, but also to organize an institution which realized the ideal with almost perfect success. To achieve this required a great personality. It required also great personalities upon which to act. To be a leader and molder of strong men, however, requires a stronger man. The master of the ideal, the molding force, upon Bradford and Brewster, at least during the Leyden sojourn, the shaper of the first successful Separatist congregation, and therefore the virtual founder of Congregationalism, was John Robinson, the Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers.



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